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# THE HOUND FROM THE NORTH

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THE WATCHERS OF THE PLAINS  
THE NIGHT-RIDERS  
THE BROODING WILD  
THE HOUND FROM THE NORTH  
THE DEVIL'S KEG

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# THE HOUND FROM THE NORTH

BY

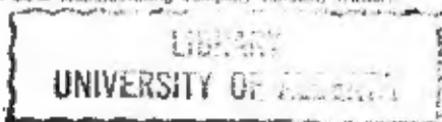
RIDGWELL CULLUM

AUTHOR OF  
THE BOOKS ON THE OPPOSITE PAGE

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# THE HOUND FROM THE NORTH

## CHAPTER I

### IN THE MOUNTAINS

A **PALLID** sun, low, gleaming just over a rampart of mountain-tops. Sundogs—heralds of stormy weather—fiercely staring, like sentries, upon either hand of the mighty sphere of light. Vast glaciers shimmering jewel-like in the steely light of the semi-Arctic evening. Black belts of gloomy pinewoods on the lower slopes of the mountains, the trees snow-burdened, but black with the darkness of the night in their melancholy depths. The earth white, snow to the thickness of many feet on all. Life none; not a beast of the earth, nor a fowl of the air, nor the hum of an insect. Solitude. Cold—grey, pitiless cold. Night is approaching.

The hill ranges which backbone the American continent—the northern extremity of the Rocky Mountains. The barrier which confronts the traveller as he journeys from the Yukon Valley to the Alaskan seaboard. Land where the foot of man but rarely treads. And mid-winter.

But now, in the dying light of day, a man comes slowly, painfully into the picture. What an atom in that infinity of awful grandeur. One little life in all that desert of snow and ice. And what a life! The poor wretch was swathed in furs, snow-shoes on his feet, and a long staff lent his drooping figure support. His whole attitude told its own tale of exhaustion. But a closer inspection, one glance into the fierce-burning eyes, which glowered from the depths of two cavernous sockets, would have added a sequel of starvation. The eyes had a frenzied look in them, the look of a man without hope, but with

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still that instinct of life burning in his brain. Every now and again he raised one numbed hand and pressed it to nose and cheeks. He knew his face was frozen, but he had no desire to stop to thaw it out. He was beyond such trifles. His upturned storm collar had become matted with icicles about his mouth, and the fur was frozen woolly to his chin whisker, but he gave the matter no heed.

The man staggered on, still onward with the dogged persistence which the inborn love of life inspires. He longed to rest, to seat himself upon the snow just where he happened to be, to indulge that craving for sleep which was upon him. The state of exhaustion fostered these feelings, and only his brain fought for him and clung to life. He knew what that drawzy sensation meant. He was slowly freezing. To rest meant sleep, to sleep meant death.

Slowly he dragged himself up the inclining ledge he was traversing. The path was low at the base of one of the softest crags. It wound its way upwards in such a fashion that he could see little more than fifty yards ahead of him as it turned away to the left as it skirted the hill. He was using his last reserves of strength, and he knew it. At the top he stood half dead. The mountain rose sheer up to dizzy heights on one side, and a precipice was on the other. He turned his dreadful eyes this way and that. Then he scanned the prospect before him—a base of dimly outlined mountains. He glanced back, tracing his uneven tracks until they disappeared in the grey evening light. Then he turned back again to a contemplation of what lay before him. Suddenly his staff slipped from his hand as though he no longer had the strength to grip it. Then raising his arms aloft, he gave vent to one despairing cry in which was expressed all the pent up agony of his soul. It was the cry of one from whom all hope had gone.

"God! God have mercy on me! I am lost—lost!"

The despairing note echoed and re-echoed among the hills. And as each echo came back to his dulled ears it was as though some invincible being mocked him. Suddenly he braced himself and his mind obtained a momentary triumph over his physical weakness. He stooped

to recover his staff. His limbs refused to obey his will. He stumbled. Then he crumpled and fell in a heap upon the snow.

All was silent and he lay quite still. Death was grasping him, and he knew it. Presently he weakly raised his head. He gazed at him with eyelids more than half closed. Is it worth the struggle? he seemed to say, is there any hope? He felt so warm, so comfortable out there in the bitter winter air. Where had been the use of heat? Where the use of the gold he had so laboriously collected at the new Eldorado? At the thought of his gold his spirit tried to rescue him from the sleep with which he was threatened. His eyelids opened wide and his eyes, from which intelligence was fast disappearing, gazed in their giant sockets. His body heaved as though he were about to rise, but beyond that he did not move.

As he lay there a sound reached his numbed ears. Clear through the crisp night air it came with the keen, keen and pattering incision which is only obtained in the still air of such latitudes. It was a human cry, a long drawn "whoop." Like his own cry it echoed amongst the hills. It only needed such as this to support the intuitions of the sufferer's will. His head was again raised. And in his wild eyes was a look of alertness—hope. He listened. He counted the echoes as they came. Then, with an almost superhuman effort, he struggled to his feet. Now life had come to him born of hope. His weakened frame answered to his great effort. His heart was throbbing madly.

As he stood up the cry came to him again, nearer this time. He moved forward and rounded the bend in the path. Again the cry. Now just ahead of him. He answered it with joy in his tone and stumbled on. Now two dark figures loomed up in the grey twilight. They were moving swiftly along the ledge towards him. They cried out something in a foreign tongue. He did not understand, but his joy was no less. They came up, and he saw before him the short, stout figures of two fur-clad Eskimos. He was saved.

\* \* \* \* \*

Inside a small dugout a dingy oil lamp shed its meekly

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ays open squall surroundings. The place was reeking with the offensive odours exhaled from the burning mud. The atmosphere was stifling.

There were four occupants of this abode and stretched in various attitudes on dusty blankets spread upon the ground. They presented a strange picture. Two of these were Eskimos. The broad, flat faces, sharp noses, and heavy lips were unmistakable, as were their dusky, greasy skins and squat figures. A third man was some thing between the white man and the redskin. He was in the set re of a half-breed, and though not exactly pleasant to look upon, he was certainly interesting as a study. He was lying with limbs outstretched and his head propped upon one hand while his gaze was directed with thoughtful intensity towards a small fire burning upon a stone, which, at that moment, was rendering the heat as unbearably hot.

The face was sallow and indented with smallpox scars. He had no hair upon it except a tuft or two of yellow hair, which the ravages of disease had condescended to leave to him. His nose, which was his best feature, was broken but beautiful in aquiline, but his mouth was wide, with a lower lip that sagged loosely from its fellow above. His head was small and was burdened with a crown of lank black hair which had been allowed to grow Indian style until it hung upon his shoulders. He was of medium height and his arms were of undue length.

The other occupant of the abode was our trapper. He was stretched upon a blanket on which was spread his fur coat, and he was alternating between the disposal of a bowl of steaming soup and gnawing with the racking pains caused by his recently thawed out front teeth.

The soup warmed his aching body, and his pain increased proportionately. In spite of the latter however he felt very much alive. Occasionally he glanced round upon his silent companions. Whenever he did so one or the other, or both of the Eskimos were glancing steadily at him.

He was rather a good looking man, notwithstanding his now unkempt appearance. His eyes were large, very large in their hollow sockets. His nose and cheeks were, at present, a mass of blisters from the thawing

frost-bites, and his mouth and chin were hidden behind a curtain of whisker of about three weeks' growth. There was no mistaking him for anything but an Anglo-Saxon, and a man of considerable and very fine proportions.

When his soup was finished he set the bowl down and leaned back with a sigh. The pock-marked man glanced over at him.

"More?" he said, in a deep, not unmusical, tone.

The half-starved traveller nodded, and his eyes sparkled. One of the Eskimos rose and re-filled the bowl from a tin camp-kettle which stood on the stove. The famished man took it and at once began to sup the invigorating liquid. The agonies of his frost-bites were terrible, but the pangs of hunger were greater. By and by the bowl was set down empty.

The half-breed sat up and crossed his legs, and leant his body against two sacks which contained something that crackled slightly under his weight.

"Give you something more solid in an hour or so. Best not have it too soon," he said, speaking slowly, but with good enunciation.

"Not now?" said the traveller, in a disappointed tone.

The other shook his head.

"We're all going to have supper then. Best wait." Then, after a pause: "Where from?"

"Forty Mile Creek," said the other.

"You don't say! Alone?"

There was a curious saving of words in this man's mode of speech. Possibly he had learned this method from his Indian associates.

The traveller nodded.

"Yes."

"Where to?"

"The sea-coast."

The half-breed laughed gutturally.

"Forty Mile Creek. Sea-coast. On foot. Alone. Winter. You must be mad!"

The traveller shook his head.

"Not mad. I could have done it, only I lost my way. I had all my stages thought out carefully. I tramped from the sea-coast originally. Where am I now?"

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The half-breed eyed the speaker curiously. He seemed to think well before he answered. Then:

"What a frosty night of the Past. I the north."

An impulsive silence followed. The half-breed continued to eye the settler, and to judge from the expression of his face his thoughts were not altogether unkind. He watched the weary face before him until the eyes gradually closed and in spite of the burning pain of the frost-bitten exhaustion did the work and the man slept. He waited for some moments listening to the heavy regular breathing, then he turned to his dog—now lying and snoring in a curious tongue. One of the Indians rose and removed a piece of bacon from a nail in the wall. This he placed in the camp-kettle on the stove. Then he took a tin box and dried it off from a bucket containing beans that had been set to soak. These also went into the camp-kettle. Then the Indian threw himself down again upon his blankets and for some time the three men continued to snore in low tones. They glanced frequently at the dog, and occasionally grunted out a curse or the like chinkle. Their whole attitude was furtive, and the man slept on.

An hour passed on. The third was more than half gone. The butchers with the smell of cooking victims. The Indians who seemed to act as cooks occasionally looked into the camp-kettle. The other two were lying on their blankets, snoring contentedly but more often than not going about before them. At length the cook uttered a sharp snap of an and lifted the steaming kettle from its place on the stove. Then he produced four deep plates from a sack and four greasy looking spoons. In one another he produced a pile of biscuits. "Hard tack" well known on the northern trails.

Supper was ready, and the pork-marked man burst over and roused the traveller.

"Food!" he said ironically, as the startled sleeper rubbed his eyes.

The man set up and gave bungles of the long pot. The Indian served out the pot with callous hands. A knife divided the pieces into four and he placed one in each panhandle. Then he poured the beans and soup

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over each portion. The biscuits were placed within reach, and the supper was served.

The sick man devoured his uncouth food with great relish. The soup which had been first given him had done him much good, and now the "solid" completed the restoration so opportunely begun. He was a vigorous man, and his exhaustion had chiefly been brought about by lack of food. Now, as he sat with his empty pannikin in front of him, he looked gratefully over at his rescuers, and slowly munched some dry biscuit, and sipped occasionally from a great beaker of black coffee. Life was very sweet to him at that moment, and he thought joyfully of the belt inside his clothes laden with the golden result of his labours on Forty Mile Creek.

Now the half-breed turned to him.

"Feeling pretty good?" he observed, conversationally.

"Yes, thanks to you and your friends. You must let me pay you for this." The suggestion was coarsely put. Returning strength was restoring the stranger to his usual condition of mind. There was little refinement about this man from the Yukon.

The other waived the suggestion.

"Sour-belly's pretty good trek when y' can't get any better. Been many days on the road?"

"Three weeks." The traveller was conscious of three pairs of eyes fixed upon his face.

"Hoofing right along?"

"Yes. I missed the trail nearly a week back. Followed the track of a dog train. It came some distance this way. Then I lost it."

"Aha! Food ran out, maybe?"

The half breed had now turned away, and was gazing at the stove as though it had a great fascination for him.

"Yes, I meant to make the Pass where I could lay in a fresh store. Instead of that I wandered on till I found the empty pack got too heavy, then I left it."

"Left it?" The half breed raised his two little tufts of eyebrows, but his eyes remained staring at the stove.

"Oh, it was simply clean empty. You see, I didn't trust anything but food in my pack."

"No. That's no. Maybe gold isn't safe in a pack?"

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The pock-marked face remained turned towards the glowing stove. The man's manner was quite indifferent. It suggested that he merely wished to talk.

The traveller seemed to draw back into his shell at the mention of gold. A slight pause followed.

"Maybe you ain't been digging up there?" the half-breed went on presently.

"It's rotten bad digging on the Creek," the traveller said, clumsily endeavouring to evade the question.

"So I've heard," said the half-breed.

He had produced a pipe, and was leisurely filling it from a pouch of antelope hide. His two companions did the same. The stranger took his pipe from his fur coat pocket and cut some tobacco from a plug. This he offered to his companions, but it was rejected in favour of their own.

"The only thing I've had that and my fur coat—to keep me from freezing to death for more than four days. Haven't seen much as seen a sign of life since I lost the dog track."

"This country's a terror," observed the half-breed emphatically.

All four men lit their pipes. The sick man only drew once or twice at his, then he laid it aside. The process of smoking caused the blisters on his face to smart terribly.

"Gives you face gyp," said the half-breed, sympathetically, "Best not bother to smoke to-night."

He puffed vigorously at his own pipe, and the two Indians followed suit. And gradually a pleasant odour, not of tobacco but some strange perfume, disguised the reek of the atmosphere. It was pungent but delightful, and the stranger remarked upon it.

"What's that you are smoking?" he asked.

For one instant the half-breed's eyes were turned upon him with a curious look. Then he turned back to the contemplation of the stove.

"Kind o' weed that grows around these wilds," he answered. "Only stuff we get hereabouts. It's good when you're used to it." He laughed quietly.

The stranger looked from one to the other of his three companions. He was struck by a sudden thought.

"What do you do here? I mean for a living?"

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"Trap," replied the breed shortly.

"Many furs about?"

"Fair."

"Slow work," said the stranger, indifferently.

Then a silence fell. The wayfarer was getting very drowsy. The pungent odour from his companion's pipes seemed to have a strangely soothing effect upon him. Before he was aware of it he caught himself nodding, and try as he would he could not keep his heavy eyelids open. The men smoked on in silence. Three pairs of eyes watched the stranger's efforts to keep awake, and a malicious gleam was in the look with which they surveyed him. He was too sleepy to observe. Besides, had he been in condition to do so, the expression of their eyes would probably have been different. Slowly his head drooped forward. He was dreaming pleasantly already, although as yet he was not quite asleep. Now he no longer attempted to keep his eyes open. Further his head drooped forward. The three men were still as mice. Then suddenly he rolled over on one side, and his stertorous breathing indicated a deep, unnatural slumber.

\* \* \* \* \*

The hut was in darkness but for a beam of light which made its way in through a narrow slit over the door. The sunlight shone down upon the huddled figure of the traveller, who still slept in the attitude in which he had rolled over on his fur coat when sleep had first overcome him. Otherwise the hut was empty. The half breed and his companion had disappeared. The fire was out. The lamp had burned itself out. The place was intensely cold.

Suddenly the sleeper stirred. He straightened himself out and turned over. Then without further warning he sat up and found himself staring up at the dazzling streak of light.

"Daylight," he murmured, "and they've let the stove go out. Gee! but I feel queer about the head."

Having his head so that his eyes should miss the glare of light, he gazed about him. He was alone, and as he realized this he scrambled to his feet, and, for the moment, the room—everything about him—seemed to be turning

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topsy-turvy. He placed his hand against the post which supported the roof and steadied himself.

"I wonder where they are?" he muttered. "Ah of course," as an afterthought, "they are out at their traps. They might have stoked the fire. It's perishing in here. I feel beastly queer; must be the effects of starvation."

Then he moved a step forward. He brought up suddenly to a standstill. His two hands went to his waist. They moved, groping round it spasmodically. Undoing his clothes he passed his hands into his shirt. Then one word escaped him. One word almost a whisper—but conveying such a world of fierce, horror-stricken intensity—

"Robbed!"

And the look which accompanied his exclamation was the look of a man whose mind is distracted.

So he stood for some seconds. His lips moved, but no words escaped them. His hand remained within his shirt, and his fingers continued to grope about mechanically. And all the time the dazed, strained look burned in his great, roving eyes.

It was gone. That broad belt, weighted down with the result of one year's toil, gold dust and nuggets, was gone. Presently he seated himself on the cold iron of the stove. Thus he sat for an hour, looking straight before him with eyes that seemed to draw closer together, so intense was their gaze. And who shall say what thoughts he thought, what wild schemes of revenge he planned? There was no outward sign. Just those silent moving lips.

## CHAPTER II

MR. ZACHARY SMITH

"Rot, man, rot! I've been up here long enough to know my way about this devil's country. No confounded neche can teach me. The trail forked at that bush we passed three days back. We're all right. I wish I felt as sure about the weather."

Leslie Grey broke off abruptly. His tone was resentful, as well as dictatorial. He was never what one might call an easy man. He was always headstrong, and never failed to resent interference on the smallest provocation. Perhaps these things were in the nature of his calling. He was one of the head Customs officials on the Canada side of the Alaskan boundary. His companion was a subordinate.

The latter was a man of medium height, and from the little that could be seen of his face between the high folds of the storm-collar of his buffalo coat, he possessed a long nose and a pair of dark, keen, yet merry eyes. His name was Robb Chillingwood. The two men were tramping along on snow-shoes in the rear of a dog-train. An Indian was keeping pace with the dogs in front, the latter, five in number, harnessed in the usual tandem fashion to a heavily-laden sled.

"It's no use anticipating bad weather," replied Chillingwood, quietly. "But as to the quest on of the trail—"

"There's no question," interrupted Grey, sharply.

"Ah, the map shows two clumps of bush. The trail turns off at one of them. My chart says the second. I studied it carefully. The 'confounded neche,' as you call him, says 'not yet.' Which means that he considers it to be the second bush. You say no."

"The neche only knows the trail by reputa. You

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have never been over it before. I have travelled it six times. You make me tired. Give it a rest. Perhaps you can make something of those nasty, sharp puffs of wind which keep lifting the ground snow at intervals."

Robb shrugged his fur coated shoulders, and glanced up at the sun. It seemed to be struggling hard to pierce a grey haze which hung over the mountains. The sun-dogs, too, could be seen, but, like the sun itself, they were dim and glowed rather than shone. That patchy wind, so well known in the west of Canada, was very evident just then. It seemed to hit the snow-covered earth, althor viciously along the surface, sweep up a thin cloud of loose surface snow, then drop in an instant, but only to operate in the same manner at some other spot. This was going on spasmodically in many directions, the snow brushing up in hissing eddies at each attack. And slowly the grey mist on the hills was obscuring the sun.

Robb Chillingwood was a man of some experience on the prairie, although, as his companion had said, he was new to this particular mountain trail. To his trained eye the outlook was not encouraging.

"Storm," he observed shortly.

"That's my opinion" said Grey definitely.

"According to calculations, if we have not got off the trail," Chillingwood went on, with a sly look at his superior, "we should reach Dougal's madude hostelry in the Pass by eight o'clock - well before dark. We ought to escape the storm."

"You mean we shall," said Grey pointedly.

"If——"

"Bunkum!"

The two men relapsed into silence. They were very good friends these two. Both were used to the strenuous Northern winter. Both understood the dangers of a blizzard. Their argument about the trail they were on was quite a friendly one. It was only the dictatorial manner of Leslie Grey which gave it the appearance of a quarrel. Chillingwood understood him, and took no notice of his somewhat irascible remarks, whilst, for himself, he remained of opinion that he had read his Ordnance chart aright.

They tramped on. Each man, with a common thought,

was watching the weather indications. As the time passed the wind "patches" grew in size, in force, and in frequency of recurrence. The haze upon the surrounding hills rapidly drearied, and the air was full of frost particles. A storm was coming on apace. Nor was Dougal's wayside hostelry within sight.

"It's a rotten life on the boundary," said Robb, as though continuing a thought aloud.

"It's not so much the life," replied Grey vindictively, "it's the d——d red tape that demands the half yearly journey down country. That's the dog's part of our business. Why can't they establish a branch bank up here for the bilion and send all 'returns' by mail? There is a postal service—of a kind. It's a one-horsed lay-out—Government work. There'll come a rush to the Yukon valley this year, and when there's a chance of doing something for ourselves—having done all we can for the Government—I suppose they'll shift us. It's the way of Governments. I'm sick of it. I draw four thousand dollars a year, and I earn every cent of it. You——"

"Draw one thousand, and think myself lucky if I taste fresh vegetables once a week during the summer. Say, Leslie, do you think it's possible to assimilate the humble but useful hog by means of a steady diet of 'sour-belly'?"

Grey laughed.

"If that were possible I guess we ought to make the primest bacon. Hallo, here comes the d——d neche. What's up now, I wonder? Well, Rainy-Moon, what is it?"

The Indian had stopped his dogs and now turned back to speak to the two men. His face was expressionless. He was a tall specimen of the Cree Indian.

"Ugh," he grunted, as he came to a standstill. Then he stretched out his arm with a wide sweep in the direction of the mountains. "No good, white-men—coyote, yes. So," and he pointed to the south and made a motion of running. "yes. Plenty beef, plenty fire-water. White-man store." His face slowly expanded into a smile. Then the smile died out suddenly and he turned to the north and made a long 'oo-o-o-sh' with rising intona-

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ton, signifying the coming wind. "How very bad. White man sleep sleep. Wake—ee." And he layed up with a shake of the head.

Then his arm dropped to his side, and he waited for Grey to speak. For a moment the Customs officer remained silent. Chingwood waited anxiously. Both men understood the Indian's meaning. Chingwood believed the man to be right abt the trail. As to the coming storm, and the probable course wherf they were caught in it, that was patient to all three.

But Grey in his characteristic pugnaciousness, gave an heed to the superior intelligence of the Indian where matters of direction in a wild country were concerned. He knew he was on the right trail. That was sufficient for him. But he surveyed the surrounding mountains well before he spoke. They had halted in a sort of cup-like basin, with towering sides surmounted by huge glaciers down which the wind was now whistling with vicious force. There were only two exits from this vast arena. The one by which the travellers had entered it, and the other directly ahead of them, the latter was only to be approached by a wide ledge which skirted one of the mountain sides and inclined sharply upwards. Higher up the mountain slope was a belt of pinewoods, over which was a stubby growth of low bush. This was curiously black in contrast with the white surroundings, for no snow was upon its weedy branches and shrivelled, discoloured leaves. Suddenly while Grey was looking out beyond the dog train, he observed the impress of snow shoes in the snow. He pointed to them and drew his companion's attention.

"You see" he said triumphantly, "there has been some one passing this way just ahead of us. Look here, echo, you just get right on and don't let me have any more nonsense about the trail."

The Indian shook his head.

"Ow, he grunted. "This little just little." Then he pointed ahead. "Big white all white. No, no, white man no come dis way. Runby echo no," and Racy Moon made a motion of lying down and sleeping. He meant that they would get lost and die in the snow.

Grey became angry.

"Get on," he shouted. And Hauny-Moss reluctantly turned and started his dogs afresh.

The little party ascended the sloping path. The whirling snow lashed their faces as the wind rushed it up from the ground in rapidly thickening clouds. The bare pines were concentrating into a steady shrieking blast. A grey cloud of snow, thin as yet, but plainly perceptible, was in the air. The threat it conveyed was no idle one. The terror of the blizzard was well known to those people. And they knew that in a short space they would have to seek what shelter they might chance to find upon these almost barren mountains.

The white men tightened the woolen scarves about the storm collars of their coats, and occasionally beat their puffed hands against their sides. The gathering wind was intensifying the cold.

"If this goes on we shall have to make that belt of pinewoods for shelter," observed Robb Chillingwood practically. "It won't do to take chances of losing the dogs - and these lead - in the storm. What say?"

They had rounded a bend and Grey was watchfully gazing ahead. He did not seem to hear his companion's question. Suddenly he pointed directly along the path towards a point where it seemed to vanish between two vast crags.

"Smile," he said. And his tone conveyed that he wished his companion to understand that he, Grey, had been right about the trail, and that Robb had been wrong. "That's Douglas's stove," he went on, after a slight pause.

Chillingwood looked as directed. He saw the rush of smoke which, in the rising storm, was suddenly swept from the mouth of a piece of upright stove pipe, which in the now grey surroundings could just be distinguished.

"But I thought there was a broad, open trail at Douglas," he said, at last, after gazing for some moments at the tiny smoke-stack.

"Maybe the road opens out here," answered Grey weakly.

But it didn't. Instead it narrowed. And as they ascended the slope it became more and more precipitous. The storm was now heating up, seemingly from every

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direction, and it was with difficulty that the five great Indian horses hauled their burden to the face of it. However, Dr. x. Moon urged them to their task with an light hand and just as the storm settled down to its work to right good earnest they drew up abreast of a small dugout. The path had narrowed down to barely six feet in width bordered on the left hand by a sharp slope upwards towards the pine wood by labour and on the right by a sheer precipice, whilst fifty feet further on there was no other path at all. As this became apparent to him, Robb Chillingwood could not help wondering what their fate might have been had the storm overtaken them earlier and they had not come upon the dugout. However he had no time for much speculation on the subject for as the dogs came to a stand the door of the dugout was thrown back and a tall, mischievous looking man stood framed in the opening.

"Kind o' struck it lucky" he observed, without any great show of enthusiasm. "Come right in. The cache can take the dogs round the side there, pointing to the left of the dugout. — There's a weatherproof shack there where I keep my bedding. Guess he can fit up in that till this d—d storm has blown itself out. You're mowed the trail. I take it. Come right in."

Half an hour later the two Customs officers were seated with their host round the camp stove which stood hissing and spitting in the centre of the hut. The dogs and Dr. x. Moon were huddled in the darkness.

Now that the travellers were divested of their heavy furs, their appearance was less picturesque but more presentable. Robb Chillingwood was about twenty-five, his whole countenance indeed a sturdy beauty of thought and a merry disposition. There was considerable strength to his brow and jaw. Leslie Grey was shorter than his companion. A man of dapper, sturdy figure and with a face good looking obtruse and displaying as much grace of humour as a hermit who has just past. He was fully thirty years of age.

This host possessed a long attenuated, but powerful figure, and a face chiefly remarkable for its calligraphic brows and a pair of hungry eyes and a dark skin whiskers.

"Yes, sir," this individual was saying, "she's goin' to howl good and hard for the next forty-eight hours, or I don't know these parts. Maybe you're from the valley?"

Chillingwood shook his head.

"No. Fact Cudaby way," he said. "My name's Chillingwood. Robb Chillingwood. This is Mr. Leslie Grey, customs officer. I am his assistant."

The long man glanced slowly at his guests. His great eyes seemed to take in the details of each man's appearance with solemn curiosity. Then he twisted slowly upon the upturned box on which he was seated and crossed his legs.

"I'm pleased to meet you, gentlemen. It's lonely in these parts—lonely." He shuddered as though with cold. "I've been trapping in these latitudes for a considerable period, and it's—lonely. My name is Zachary Smith."

As the trapper pronounced his name he glanced keenly from one to the other of the two men beside him. His look was suggestive of doubt. He seemed to be trying to reassure himself that he had never before crossed the paths of these chance guests of his. After a moment of apprehensive silence he went on slowly, like one groping in darkness. His confidence was not fully established.

"You can make up your minds to a couple of days in this shanty—anyhow. I mostly live on 'sour-belly' and 'hard tack.' Don't sound inviting, eh?"

Chillingwood laughed pleasantly.

"We're Government officials," he said with meaning.

"Yes," put in Grey. "But we've got plenty of canned truck in our baggage. I'm thinking you may find our supplies a pleasant change."

"No doubt no doubt whatever. Cat's meat would be a delicacy after—months of tallinny pork."

This slow-spoken trapper surveyed his guests thoughtfully. The travellers were enjoying the comforting shelter and warmth. Neither of them seemed particularly talkative.

Presently Grey roused himself. Extreme heat after extreme cold always has a somnolent effect on those who experience it.

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"We'd best get the—stuff off the sleigh, Chillingwood," said he. "Rainy Moon's above the average Indian for honesty, but, nevertheless, we don't need to take chances. And," as the younger man rose and stretched himself, "food is good on occasions. What does Mr. Zachary Smith say?"

"Ay, let's sample some white-man's grub. Gentlemen, this is a fortunate meeting all round."

Chillingwood passed out of the hut. As he opened the door a vindictive blast of wind swept a cloud of snow in, and the frozen particles fell crackling and hissing upon the glowing stove.

"And they call this a white-man's country," observed Mr. Smith penitively, as the door closed again. He opened the stove and proceeded to knock the embers together preparatory to stoking up afresh.

"Guess you were making for the Pass," he said conversationally.

"Yes," replied Grey.

"Missed the trail," the other said, pitching a cordwood stick accurately into the centre of the glowing embers.

Grey made no answer.

"Isn't in the way of Governments to show consideration to their servants," Mr. Smith went on, filling the stove with fuel to the limit of its holding capacity. "It's a deadly season to be forced to travel about in."

"Consideration," said Grey bitterly. "I'm forced to undertake this journey twice a year. Which means I am on the road the best part of my time. And merely because there is no bank or authorized place for depositing—"

"Ah, gold," put in Mr. Zachary Smith quietly.

"And reams of 'returns'!"

"They reckon that the 'rush' to the Yukon'll come next year. Maybe things will alter then."

Smith straightened himself up from his occupation. His face displayed but the most ordinary interest in the conversation.

At that moment Chillingwood returned bearing two small brass-bound chests. The Indian followed him bringing a number of packages of tinned food. Smith glanced from the chests—which were as much as Chilling-

and could carry to the angular proportions of the  
exterior garden, then back again to the chess. He  
was as dexterous as the other boys in the latter, though  
not quite up to the stage and up to the dan per-

Thus followed a period of which all three partook with that restlessness which comes of an appetite induced by a hasty, eventful life. They talked but little while they ate, and that little was of the prospects of the new trade. Uncle Grey spoke with the bitterness of a dissatisfied man. In reality he had been successful in all his aims he had adopted. But some men are born gamblers, and he was one. It is probable that had he been born a prince he would have been a better gambler than that he was not a king. Charingwood was different, he avoided the saloon and enjoyed his life. He was a good man, whilst faithfully doing that which he regarded his duty, but to himself there to his employers, the method of life was nothing like that of the same Uncle Grey appreciated the motto of the welfare gentrified  
one hand for himself and one for his employer. When asked with both hands the self. He meant to break away from his present environment when the Yukon "rush" came. In the meantime he was on the spot. His strong health was unbroken. He could eat and watch his guests. He could study them. And he seemed as if he was inclined to waste his time on words when he could do the other two things. He said little about himself, and was mainly too intent with comprehensive nests and grunts, whilst he devoured his portions of tinned tongue and swelled bumpers of scalding tea.

After dinner the travellers put aside their papers. Grey turned his back to their hosts. Mr. Zachary Smith shook his head.

"I've got up tobacco mostly," he said, glancing in the direction of the door, which groaned under a sudden attack from the storm which was now howling with terrible force outside. "It isn't that I don't like it but when a man gets cooped up in these hills he's liable to run out of it, and then it's uncomfortable. I've taken to a native weed which does me for smoking when I need it. It's not often. It grows hereabouts and won't burn to give out. Guess I won't smoke now."

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Grey shrugged and lit his pipe. If any man could be fool enough to reject tobacco, Leslie Grey was not the sort of man to press him. He was into it, and it was in any one but himself. The grizzled sucker leisurely lit his pipe and the guttug things.

The black smoke clouds eddied insinuatingly about the heads of the smokers, and rose heavily upon the dense atmosphere of the hut. The two men stretched themselves indolently upon the ground, sometimes a talking, but for the most part silent. There was scarcely thought but of time. They had a certain task to perform which the elements permitting they would carry out in due course. In the meantime it was a sitting and they had been fortunate in finding shelter in these wastes of snow and ice. They were glad to accept what comfort came their way. This cold, reed dwelling would find a simple record in Leslie Grey's report to his superiors. "Owing to a heavy storm etc." They were two verminous persons. The nature of these men above was all very monotonous, but they were used to it, and use is a wonderful thing. It so closely borders on content.

Cards were produced later on. Mr. Zachary Smith wanted the blind shrews of "not think" cards. He had no money to spare for gambling, he informed his guests, he would look no. He sat over the stove whilst the others played. Later on the cards were put away and the travellers, curling themselves into their blankets composed themselves to sleep.

The lean figure sat silently blinking at the red sides of the fire box. His legs were crossed and he curved his knee in a painful ambrace. For nearly an hour he sat thus, and only the slow movement of his great rolling eyes, and an occasional inclination of his head told of the active thought which was passing behind his mask-like features.

As he sat there he looked older by half a score of years than either of his companions, but in reality, he was a young man. The furrows and hollows upon his face were the marks of privation and exposure, not of age. The bowed figure was not the result of weakness or gendly, it was chiefly the result of great he girt and the slouching gait of one who has done much slow tramping. His

Zachary Smith made an interesting study as he sat silently beside his stove.

His face was the face of an honest man—when his eyes were concealed beneath their heavy lids. It was a good face, and refined, tough, vigorous, honest, until the eye-lids were raised. Then the expression was utterly changed. A something looked out from those great rolling eyeballs which was furtive, watchful, doubtful. They were eyes one sometimes sees in a madman or a great criminal. And now, as he sat absorbed in his own reflections, their gaze alternated between the two brass-bound chests and the recumbent figure of Leshe Grey.

So he sat, this self-styled Zachary Smith, trapper.

## CHAPTER III

### MR. ZACHARY SMITH SMOKES

It was the third morning of the travellers' sojourn, in Mr. Smith's dugout. Two long idle days had been spent in the fetid atmosphere of the trapper's half-burned house. During their enforced stay neither Grey nor his subordinates had learnt much of their reticent host. It is doubtful if they had troubled themselves much about him. He had greeted them with a sort of indifferent hospitality, and they were satisfied. It was not in the nature of their work to question the characters of those whom they encountered upon their journey. To all that he had Mr. Zachary Smith had made them welcome, they could expect no more, they needed no more. Now the day had arrived for their departure, for the storm had subsided and the sun was shining with all its wintry splendour.

The three men leisurely devoured an early morning breakfast.

Mr. Smith was quite cheerful. He seemed to be labouring under some strange excitement. He looked better, too, since the advent of his guests. Perhaps it was the result of the ample supplies of canned provisions which the two men had lavished unspareingly upon him. His face was less cadaverous, the deep searing furrows were less pronounced. Altogether there was a marked improvement in this solitary dweller in the wild. Now he was discussing the prospects of the weather, whilst he partook liberally of the food set before him.

"These things aren't like most storms," he said. "They blow themselves out and have done with it. They don't come back on you with a change of wind. That isn't the way of the blizzard. We've got a clear spell

of a fortnight and more before us—with luck. Now, which way may you be taking, gentlemen? are you going to head through the mountains for the main trail, or are you going to double on your tracks?"

"We are going back," said Grey, with unpleasant emphasis. Any allusion to his mistake of the road annoyed him.

Chillingwood turned his head away and hid a smile.

"I think you will do well," replied the trapper largely. "I know these hills, and I should be inclined to hark back to where you missed the trail. I hope to cover twenty miles myself to-day."

"Your traps will be buried, I should say," suggested Robb.

"I'm used to that," replied the tall man quietly. "Guess I shan't have much difficulty with 'em." He permitted himself the suspicion of a smile.

Grey drew out his pipe, and leisurely loaded it. Robb followed suit. Mr. Zachary Smith pushed his tin panama away from before him and leaned back.

"Going to smoke?" he asked. "Guess I'll join you. No, not your plug, thanks. I'm feeling pretty good. My weed'll do me. You don't fancy to try it?"

"T and B's good enough for me," said Grey, with a smile. "No, I won't experiment."

Smith held his pouch towards Chillingwood.

"Can I?"

Robb shook his head with a doubtful smile.

"Guess not, thanks. What's good enough for my chief is good enough for me."

The trapper slowly unfolded an antslope-hide pouch of native workmanship. He emptied out a little pile of greenish-brown flakes into the palm of his hand. It was curious, dusty-looking stuff, suggestive of discoloured bran. This he poured into the bowl of a well-worn briar, the mouthpiece of which he carefully and with accuracy adjusted into the corner of his mouth.

"If you ever chance to have the experience I have had in these mountains, gentlemen," he then went on slowly, as gathering into the palm of his hand a red hot cinder from the stove he tossed it to and fro until it lodged on the bowl of his pipe. "I think you'll find the

use of the weed which grows on this hillside," with a jerk of his head upwards to indicate the bush which flourished in that direction, "has its advantages."

"Mavts," said Grey contemptuously.

"I doubt it," said Robb, with a pleasant smile.

The bear man knocked the cinders from his pipe and emitted a cloud of pungent smoke from between his lips. The others had lit up. But the odour of the trapper's weed quickly dominated the atmosphere. He talked rapidly now.

"You folks who travel the main trails don't see much of what is going on in the mountains—the real life of the mountains," he said. "You have no conception of the real dangers which these hills contain. Yes, sir, they're hidden from the public eye, and only get to be known outside by reason of the chance experience of the traveller who happens to lose his way, but is lucky enough to escape the pitfalls with which he finds himself surrounded. I could tell you some queer yarns of these hills."

"Travellers' tales," suggested Grey, with a yawn and a disengaging smile. "I have heard some."

"Yes," said Robb, "there are queer tales afloat of adventures encountered by travellers journeying from the valley to the coast. But they're chiefly confined to way-side robbery, and are of a very sordid, everyday kind. No doubt your experiences are less matter-of-fact and more romantic. By Jove, I feel jolly cranky, but much like turning out."

"That's how it takes me," said Smith quietly, but with a quick glance at the speaker. "But idleness won't do my pet. It's a remarkable thing that I've felt wonderfully energetic these last few days, and now that I have to turn out I should prefer to stop where I am. I s'pose it's human nature."

He gazed upon his audience with a broad smile.

At that moment the loud yelping of the dogs penetrated the thick sides of the d'gout. Rainy Moon was preparing for the start. Doubtless the brilliant change in the weather had inspired the savage burden-bearers of the north.

"That's onions-smelling stuff, you're smoking," said

Grey, rousing himself with an effort after a moment's dead silence. "What do you call it?"

"Can't say—a weed," said Zachary Smith, glancing down his nose towards the bowl of his pipe. "Not bad, is it? Smells of almonds—tastes like nutty sherry."

Grey stifled a yawn.

"I feel sleepy &—d sleepy. Wonder if Rainy-Moon has got the sleigh loaded?"

Smith emitted another dense cloud of smoke from between his pursed lips, he seemed wrapt in the luxurious enjoyment of his smoke. Hobbs Chillingwood's eyelids were drooping and his pipe had gone out. Quite suddenly the trapper's eyes were turned on the face of Grey and the smoke from his pipe was chiefly directed towards him.

"There's time enough yet," he said quietly. "Half an hour more or less won't make much difference to you on the road. You were talking of travellers' tales, and I reckon you were thinking of fairy yarns that some folks think it smart to spin. Well, maybe those same stories have some foundation in fact, and ain't all works of imagination. Anyhow, my experience has taught me never to disbelieve until I've some good sound grounds for doing so."

He paused and gazed with a far-off look at the opposite wall. Then a shadowy smile stole over his face, and he went on. His companions' heads had drooped slowly forward, and their eyes were heavy with sleep. Grey was fighting against the drowsiness by jerking his head sharply upwards, but his eyes would close in spite of his efforts.

"Well, I never thought that I'd get caught napping," continued Smith, with a chuckle. "I thought I knew these regions well enough, but I didn't. I lost my way, too, and came near to losing my life—"

He broke off abruptly as Hobbs Chillingwood slowly rolled over on his side and began to snore loudly. Then Smith turned back to Leslie Grey, and leaning forward, so that his face was close to that of the other, blew clouds of the pungent smoke right across the half-stupified man's mouth and nostrils.

"I lost other things," he then went on meditatively, "but not my life. I lost that which was more precious

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to me. I lost gold—gold! I lost the result of many weary months of toil. I had boarded it up that I might go down to the east and buy a nice little ranch, and settle down into a comfortable, respectable man of property. I didn't even wait until the spring opened so that I could take the river route. No, that wasn't my way, because I knew it would cost a lot of money and I wasn't ever burdened with wealth. I had just enough —"

He puffed vigorously at his pipe. Grey's head was now hanging forward and his chin rested on his chest.

There came the sound of Ra'y Mona's voice adjuring the dogs outside the door of the dugout. The trapper's eyes flashed evilly in the direction of the unconscious Indian.

"—to do what I wanted," he resumed. "No more—no less, and I set out on foot." He was anxiously watching for Grey's collapse. "Yes, I was going to tramp to the sea-coast through these mountains. I hit the wrong trail, decoyed by a false track carefully made by those who waited for me in these hills." Grey was swaying heavily and his breathing was stertorous. "I met my fate and was robbed of my gold. I was drugged—so you poor fools are being drugged now. When it was too late I discovered how it was done and determined to do the same thing by the first victim that fell into my snatches. I tried the weed and soon got used to its fumes. Then I waited—waited. I had set my decoy at the cross roads and you—you came."

As the trapper ceased speaking Grey slowly rolled over, insensible.

In a moment the watching man was upon his feet. His whole face was transfigured. Alertness was in every movement, in every flash of his great eyes. He moved quickly across the floor of the hut and took two shallow panikins from the sack which lay upon the floor, dropped some of the fatty weed into the bottoms of each one and then from the stove he scraped some coals of fire into them. The fire set the dry weed smouldering, and the thick smoke rose heavily from the two tins. These he placed upon the ground in such a position that his half breathing victim should thoroughly inhale the fumes. Thus he would make doubly sure of them.

This done he stood erect and gazed for some moments at the result of his handiwork. He was satisfied, but there was no look of pleasure on his face. He did not look like a man of naturally criminal instincts. There was nothing savage about his expression, or even callous. His look merely seemed to say that he had set himself this task, and as far as what he had done was satisfactory in view of his object. He turned from the heap of smothering ashes and his eyes fell upon the two small good chests. Instantly his whole expression changed. Here was the keynote to the man's character. "Good!" It was the gold he coveted. At all costs that gold was to be had. It was above all with greed. He moved toward the boxes as though he were about to handle them; but he paused abruptly before he touched them. The barking of the dogs and the strident voices of the Indians outside arrested him. He suddenly remembered that he had not yet completed his work.

Now he moved with a supremely stealthy step over to the darkest corner of the hut, to where a pile of rough skins stood. The steady nerve which had hitherto served him seemed in a measure to have weakened. It was a phase which a man of his spirit could not easily pass through in the perpetration of a first crime. He was assailed by a sensation of watching eyes following his every movement, with a feeling that another presence than those two of inferring forms moved with him in the dim light of the doorway. He was haunted by his other self, the moral self.

From beneath the pile of furs he drew a heavy revolver which he carefully examined. The chambers were loaded.

Again came the sound of the dogs outside. And he even fancied he heard the shuffling of their Master's movements over the beaten snow just outside the door. He turned his face in the direction. The expression of his great hungry eyes was malevolent. Whatever moral fear might have been his, there could be no doubt that he would carry his purpose out. He gripped his pistol firmly and moved towards the door.

As his hand rested on the latch he paused. Just for one instant he hesitated. It seemed as though all that was honest in him was making one final appeal to the

evil passions which possessed him. The words lowered suddenly as though he could not even face the dim light of that gloomy interior. It was the attitude of one who fully realises the outcome of his actions, of one who shrinks from the light of honest purpose and prefers the obscure recesses of his own moral darkness. Then with an effort he pulled himself together, he gripped his nerve. The next moment he flung wide the door.

A flood of water burst on him and the interior of the dugout. The glass of the crystal white earth was dazzling to a degree and the hunger-lusting trapper stood barking in the light. His hand was clenched behind him. The sleigh was before the door. Harry Moon stood on the far side of the path in the act of barking the dogs up. One of the animals, the largest of them all, was already barking; the others were standing or squatting around, held in check by the Indian.

When he heard the door open Harry Moon backed up from his work. He was standing with his back to the prospect which bordered the narrow ledge. His great stolid face expressed nothing but absolute gravity. He gritted and turned again to his work.

Like a flash the trapper's pistol darted from behind him, and its report rang out, echoing and reverberating amongst the pines riding high. There was an answering cry of pain from the barking dog and Harry Moon with a yell stood erect to find himself going into the muzzle of the revolver. The expression of the trapper's face was relentless now. The first shot had been fired under the influence of excitement, and he had missed his object and only wounded the dog. Now it was different.

Again the pistol rang out. Harry Moon gave one sharp cry of pain and sprang backwards into space. In one hand he still gripped the leaders of the dogs. The other clutched wildly at the air. For one instant he felt his bones broken by his fall, then the four dogs, then the suddenness of his precipitation and his weight told and the poor beasts were dragged over the side of the cliff after him.

The whole dastardly act was but the work of a moment.

The next all was silent save for the yelping of the wounded dog lying upon the snow.

The trapper stood for a moment framed in the doorway. The horror of his crime was upon him. He waited for a second to come up to him from below. He longed to, but he dared not, look over the side of the yawning chasm. He feared what awful sight his eyes might encounter. His imagination conjured up pictures that turned him sick in the stomach, and a great dread came over him. And truly he turned back into the hut and slammed the door.

The wounded dog had not changed its attitude. The moments sped by. Suddenly the poor beast began to struggle furiously. It was a huge specimen of the husky breed, except unusually powerful and turbulent in appearance. The wretched brute moaned incessantly, but its pain only made it struggle the harder to free itself from its harness. At length it succeeded in wriggling out of the primitive "breast draw" which held it. Then the suffering beast limped painfully away down the path. Fifty yards from the hut it squatted upon its haunches and began to lick its wounded foot. And every now and then it would cease its healing operation to throw up its long muscles and emit one of those drawn-out howls, so dismal and despairing, in which dogs are able to express their melancholy feelings.

At length the hut door opened again and the trapper came out. He was equipped for a long journey. Thick black leather covered his legs, and a great fur coat reached to his knees. The head was buried beneath a beaver cap, which, pressed low down over his ears, was overlaid by the collar of his coat. He carried a roll of blankets over his shoulder and a pack on his back. As he came out into the sunth he looked fearfully about him. There stood the loaded sleigh quite undisturbed. The harness alone was tumbled about by reason of the wounded dog's struggles. And there was a pool of crimson blood upon the snow and a faint trail of ferruginous hue leading from it. The man eyed this and followed its direction until he saw the dog croaking down further along the path. But he was not thinking of the dog. He turned back to the sleigh, and his eyes wandered across, beyond it, to the brink of the precipice. The only marks that had disturbed the smooth white

edge of the path were those which had tumbled the snow where the dogs had been dragged to their fate. Otherwise there was no sign.

The man stepped forward as though to look down to the depths below, but, as he neared the edge, he halted shudderingly. Nor did his eyes turn downwards, he looked around him, above him, but not down. He gazed long and earnestly at the hard, cold, cloudless sky. His brow frowned with unpleasant thought. Then his lips moved, and he muttered words that sounded as though he were endeavouring to justify his acts to himself.

"The gold was mine. Honestly mine. It was wrested from me. It may be Christian to submit without retaliation. It is not human. What is a ne'er-a-lie—nothing. Pook! An Indian life is of so value in this country. Come on, let's go."

He spoke as though he were not alone. Perhaps he was adressing that moral self of his which kept reminding him of his iniquity. Anyhow, he was uncomfortable, and his words told of it.

He stooped and adjusted his snow-shoes, after which he gripped his long staff and slowly began his journey down the hill.

He quickly got into his stride, that forward, leaning attitude of the snow-shoer, nor did he glance to the left or right.

Straight ahead of him he stared, over the jagged rampart of mountains to the clear steely hue of the sky above. He was leaving the scene of his crime, he wished also to leave its memory. He gave no heed to the trail of blood that stained the whiteness of the snow beneath his feet; his thoughts were not of the present—his present, his mind was travelling swiftly beyond. The whining of the dog as he passed him fell upon ears that were deaf to all entreaty.

The crystal covered earth glided by him, the long-reaching stride of the expert snow-shoer bore him rapidly along.

He paused in the valley below and took fresh bearings. He intended to stride through the heart of the mountains. The Pass was his goal, for he knew that there lay the main trail he sought.

He cast about for the landmarks which he had located during his long tenancy of the dugout. Not a branch of a tree rustled. Not a breath of air fanned the steaming breath which poured from his lips. His mind was centred on his object, but the nervous realization of loneliness was upon him.

Suddenly the awful silence was broken. The man beat his head to a belching attitude. The sound came from behind and he turned sharply. His movement was hurried and anxious. His nerves were not steady. A long drawn out wail rose upon the air. Fifty yards behind stood the wounded hawk gazing after him as if he, too, were endeavouring to ascertain the right direction. The creature was standing upon three legs, the fourth was hanging useless, and the blood was dripping from the felonious limb.

The man turned away with an impatient shrug and stepped out breathily. He knew his direction now, and roundily centred his thoughts upon his journey. Past experience told him that this would tax all his energy and endurance, and that he must keep a clear head for he was not a native of the country, nor had the last net of one whose life had been passed in a mountainous world. Once he turned at the sound of a primitive whining and in his ignorance he saw that the dog was following him. A half nervous laugh escaped him, but he did not pause. He had hitherto forgotten the creature, and this was an unpleasant reminder.

An hour passed. The exhilarating excretion had cleaned the atmosphere of the murderer's thoughts. Once only he looked back over his shoulder at some memory of the dog dashed across his brain. He could see nothing but the immaculate gleam of snow. Something of the purity of his surroundings seemed to communicate itself to his thoughts. He found himself looking forward to a life the honest, respectable life which the borders he turned in his pack would purchase for him. He saw himself the owner of vast tracts of pasture, with stock grazing upon it, a small but comfortable house, and a wife. He pictured to himself the joys of a pastoral life, a community in which his opinions and influence could be matters of importance. His would be looked up to,

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and gradually as his health grew, he would become interested in the world of politics and he would

He was dragged back to the present by a memory of the time of the digests, and quite suddenly he broke into a wild perspiration. He regarded his pace, and did these peasant voices again return to him. It was still past noon when at last he reached the farm and took

He devoted his energies to the service of his country, but he guarded his enjoyment thereof. He was modest. At that moment he hated life; he hated himself for his weak yielding to the passings of moment; he hated the snow and ice about him for their deadening effect upon the world through which he was passing. He hated the dreadful multitude with which he was surrounded.

Presently he drew out a pipe. He looked at it for a moment then raised it to his nose. He snuffed it and with a number of drags and a little pause, he threw it from him. It consisted of the wood he had found at the farm.

Now he was armed with a general remittance, and was about to run to his feet. Suddenly got up on the still littered air waved the familiar long drawn note of money. To his distressed fancy it came like a direful signal of some sort'd down. It seemed as unlading leaves of snow, during a very hard rain, though it were with to leave the mountain passings. He turned in the direction whence it proceeded, and slowly into view humped the mounted horse, so long potently at every step.

At that instant the man was greatly surprised for what he did. He was struck himself with dread. The instant was on his nerves, the barking dog his own reflections, all had conspired to lead the man to the verge of nervous prostration. With the last dying sound his heavy revolver was leveled in the direction of the oncoming hound. There was a moment's pause, then a shot rang out and the dog stood quite still. The bullet had struck and only kicked up the snow, being buried in front of the animal, nor did the beast display the least sign of fear. The man prepared to face another shot but, as he was about to fire his arm slipped to the side and, with a sharp hiss, struck the steel of a scimitar.

another. The words were an apology to himself, although perhaps he would not have admitted it.

The dog remained in the rigid attitude. Its head was slightly lowered and its wicked grey eyes glared ferociously. Its thick mane bristled and it bared bare a good, hungry wolf bawling upon the head of man and man upon the head of the dog. So long as the man stood, so long did the dog remain still and silent. But as the former returned to his seat, and began to pull up the dog traps to where his furiously dead master,

Although he did not look up the man knew that the animal was coming towards him. When he had finished pulling he straightened himself, the dog was at that a few paces of him. He raised gently and the animal responded with a whimpers but remained where it was. Its manes hair was evidently dishevelled, and the man was bound to take the creature. Whatever man have been his intention in the first place he now exhibited a curious display of feeling for one who could pass and perpetrate such a dastardly a crime as that which he had committed at the quarry. Human nature is a strange blending of good and evil passions. Two minutes ago the man would, without the least remorse, have shot the dog. Now as he reached him and he listened to the heart a plaintive cry, he stretched out his arm and stroked its trembling sides, and then stooped to examine the wounded limb. And stranger still he tore off a portion of the wounded part that covered his hand and proceeded to bandage up the shattered member. The dog submitted to the operation with languid resignation. The foot of one hind leg had been entirely torn away by a receiver shot, and only the stump of the leg was left. The poor beast would go on three legs for the rest of his life.

When the man had finished he rose to his feet, and a bitter laugh checked the career of the snow bound world.

"There you miserable cur. It's better like that than to get the cold into it. I've had some, brother. I didn't intend to damage you. If you're going to travel with me you'd best come along and be *dead* to you."

And he walked back to where his pack and blankets lay, and the dog hopped at his heels.

## CHAPTER IV

### 'YELLOW BOOKING—SLUMP IN GREY'

The days are long since gone when the name of the prairie territory of the great Canadian world, Manitoba, suggested to the uninitiated nothing but Red Indians, buffalo and desperadoes of every sort and condition. Now-a-days it is well known, even in remote parts of the world, as one of the earth's greatest granaries, a land of rolling pastures, golden cornfields and prosperous, simple farm folk. In a short space of time, little more than a quarter of a century, this section of the country has been elevated from the profound obscurity of a lawless wilderness to one of the most thriving provinces of a great dominion. The old Fort Garry, one of the oldest factories of the Hudson's Bay Company, has given place to the magnificent city of Winnipeg, with its own University, its own governing assembly, its own clubs, hotels, its own world wide commercial interests, besides being the great centre of railway traffic in the country. All these things, and many other indications of splendid prosperity too numerous to mention, have grown up in a little over twenty-five years. And with this growth the buffalo has gone, the red man has been herded on to a limited reservation, and the "Bad-man" is almost an unknown quantity. Such is the Manitoba of to-day.

But during the stages of Manitoba's transition its history is interesting. The fight between law and lawlessness was long and arduous, the pitched battles many and frequent. Buffalo could be killed off quickly, the red-man was but a poor thing after the collapse of the Red rebellion, but the "Bad-man" died hard.

This is the period in the history of Manitoba which

at present interests us. When Winnipeg was building with a rapidity almost惊人的 that of the second Change, and the army of outer farmers in the land was being hastily augmented by recruits from the mother country. When the military post had withdrawn their forces to the North-West Territories leaving only detachments to hold the American border against the desperadoes which both countries were equally anxious to be rid of.

In the remote south-eastern corner of the province, forty-five miles from the nearest town, which happened to be the village of A, we clanged down on the crest of a far-reaching range, the swell of rolling prairie, bare to the blast of the four winds except for the insignificant shelter of a small cliff on its north-eastern side. stood a large farm house surrounded by a small village of barns and outbuildings. It was a typical Canadian farm of the older, western type. One of those places which have grown by degrees from the one central lot of logs, clay and thatch to the more pretentious proportions of the a stem frame building of red pine weather boarding with shingled roofing to match, and the whole coloured with paint of a deep, port wine hue the porches and eaves being picked out with a dazzling white. It was a farm, let there be no mistake, and not merely a homestead.

There were abundant signs of prosperity in the trim, well groomed appearance of the place. The unmistakable hall mark was to be found in the presence of a steam thresher buried beneath a covering of tarpon-ho and snow, in the array of farming machinery and in the mass of pastures enclosed by top-railled barbed-wire fencing. All these things, and the extent of the buildings, told of years of unceasing industry and thrift, of able management and a proper pride in the vocation of its owner.

Nor were these outward signs in any way misleading. Miss Mayring in her lifetime had been one of those sound-minded men, unimaginative and practical, the dominant note of whose creed had always been to do his duty in that state of life in which he found himself. The son of an early pioneer he had been born to the life of a farmer, and, having the good fortune to follow in the footsteps

of a thirty-fifth. He had lived long enough to see his farm grow to an extent many times larger and more prosperous than that of any neighbour within a radius of a hundred miles. But at the time of our story he had been gathered to his fathers for nearly three years, and his widow, Mrs. Mary Marling, required to be seated. She had such an equally placid hand, and fortune had continued to smile upon her. Her looks however had grown by leaps and bounds, and she began to be one of the most attractive women in Southern Manitoba, and her only daughter, Prudence, to be known to no inconsiderable fortune. There was a man in the family, but he had abandoned the farm, the land passing out of the home circle in some sort and had gone into the world to seek his own way. His own experience of life

In spite of the wealth of the owners of Bush Lake Farm they were very simple unpretentious folk. They lived the life they had always known, abiding by the customs of childhood and the country to which they belonged with the whole-hearted regard which is now becoming so regrettable now. Their world was a whole community which provided them with all they needed for thought, labour and recreation. To journey to Winnipeg, a distance of a hundred and twenty miles, was an event which required two days preparation and as many weeks of consideration. A very one of these little border villages which dot the international boundary dividing Canada from the United States, was a place rarely visited by them, and when undertaken the trip was regarded as a notable jaunt.

Just now Mrs. Marling was a prey to the wildest excitement. An event was about to happen which disturbed her to a degree. It is doubtful as to what feeling was uppermost in her motherly bosom. The mixture between many conflicting emotions, joy, grief, pleasurable excitement. Her daughter, her only child as she was about to confide to her matronly friends, for her boy whom she loved as only a mother can love a son, she believed she would never see again, one about to be married.

No road to town, not even a sea voyage across the ocean could possibly compare with this. It was a more significant event in her life even than when she went up

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When reg to choose the monument which was to be erected over the grave of her departed Silas. That she had always had in her mind were not because she looked forward to his demise, but because she hoped some day to share with him its sheltering canopy. But somehow this forthcoming marriage of her daughter was in the nature of a shock to her. She was not messenger, far from it, she was above any such motive as that, but she had hoped, when the time came for such matters to be considered, that Prudence would have married a certain teacher who lived out by the Lake of the Woods, a man of great wealth and a man whom Mrs. Young considered desirable in every way. Instead of that Prudence had chosen for herself amongst her many suitors, and worst of all she had chosen an insignificant official in the Customs department. That to Hepzibah Hading was the worst blow of all. With proper motherly pride she had hoped that "her girl" would have married a "some one" in her own world.

The winter evening shadows—it was the middle of January and winter still held sway upon the prairie—were falling and the parlour at the farm was enveloped in a grey dusk. The room was large, low-ceiled, and of irregular shape.

It was furnished to serve many purposes, principally with a view to solid comfort. There was no blatant display of wealth and every article of furniture bore signs of long though careful use. The spotless boarded floor was bare of carpet, but was strewn with rough cured skins, timber wolf, antelope, coyote and bear, and here and there rugs of undoubtedly home make, these latter of the patchwork order. The centre table was of wide proportions and of solid mahogany and told of the many services of the apartment, the small chairs were old fashioned mahogany pieces with horsehair seats, while the easy chairs and there were several of these were spacious and of divers descriptions. A well worn sofa was stowed away in an obscure angle and a piano with a rose silk front and fretwork occupied another of the many dark corners which the room presented.

The whole atmosphere of the place was of extreme comfort. The bare description of furniture leaves

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nothing but the comfort was there and showed out in the odds and ends of family possessions which were in evidence everywhere—the grandfather's clock, the sewing machine, the quaint old oil lamp upon the mantel board over the place where the fire should have been but was not, the soft hangings and curious old family pictures and discoloured engravings, the perfect femininity of the room. In all respects it was a Canadian farm "best parlour."

There were four occupied parts of the room. Two old ladies, round and gartered in modest garment of some sort of dark clinging material were gathered about the monster self-feeding stove, seated in arm chairs in keeping with their ample proportions. One was the widow of the late Silas Malling, and the other was the school master from the Lyons Academy house. This good lady received in the name of her teacher, and Mrs. Gurnidge was the oldest friend of Hephzibah Malling, a fact which spoke highly for the former girl dame's many excellent qualities. Mr. Hatch was not a woman to bestow affections on her sex without good reason. Her moral standard was high and though she was ever ready to show kindness to her fellow creatures, she was far too practical and honest herself to take to her motherly bosom any one who was not worthy of regard.

As was natural, there were talking of the forthcoming marriage, and the tone of their lowered voices indicated that their remarks were in the nature of confidences. Mrs. Malling was sitting bolt upright, and her plump, rather rough hands were folded in her broad lap. Mrs. Gurnidge was leaning towards the stove, gazing into the fire through the mine-sides of the fire box.

"I trust they will be happy" said Mrs. Gurnidge, with a sigh. Then an after thought. "He seems all right."

"Yes," Mrs. Malling said with a responsive exhalation. "I think so. He has few faults. But he is not the man to follow my *Sis* on this farm. I truly believe, Sarah, that he couldn't tell the difference between a cabbage-field and a potato patch. There what I call em, civil servants, are only fit to tot up figures and play around with a woman's wardrobe every time she crosses the border. Thank goodness I'm not of the travelling

Mad, I'm sure I should hide my face for very shame every time I see a Customs officer."

The round, rosy face of the farm wife assumed a drooper but, and her still comely lips were pressed into an indignant curve. Her smooth grey head, adorned by a black lace cap trimmed with pink ribbons, was turned in the direction of the two other occupants of the room, who were more or less buried in the obscurity of a distant corner.

For a moment she gared at the dimly outlined figure of a man who was seated on one of the lower high chairs, leaning towards the sofa on which reclined the form of his daughter, Prudence. His elbows were resting on his knees and his chin was supported upon his two clenched fists. He was talking earnestly. Mrs. Malling watched him for some moments, then her eyes drifted to the girl, the object of her solicitude.

Although the latter was in the shadow her features were, even at that distance, plainly discernible. There was a strong resemblance between mother and daughter. They were both of medium dark complexion, with strong colouring. Both were possessed of delicate, sweet brown eyes, and mouths and chins firm but shapely. The one remarkable difference between them was in the nasal organ. While the mother's was short, well rounded, and what one would call pretty though ordinary, the girl's was prominent and aquiline with a decided bridge. This feature gave the younger woman a remarkable amount of character to her face. All together here was a face which wherever she went, would inevitably attract admiring attention. Just now she was evidently listening to the man before her, and the mother turned back to the stove with a merry twinkle in her eyes.

"I think Prudence will teach him a few lessons," she murmured to her friend.

"What—about the farm?"

"Well, I wasn't just thinking of the farm."

The two ladies smiled into each other's faces.

"She is a good child," observed Mrs. Gurnidge affectionately, after a while.

"Or she wouldn't be her father's child."

"Or your daughter, Hepzibah," said Sarah Gurnidge slyly.

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The two relapsed into silence. The glowing embers in the stove shrank lower and received augmentation from the supply above. Darkness was drawing on.

Prudence was holding the *Free Press* out towards the dying light and the man was protesting. The latter is already known to us. His name was Leslie Grey, now an under-official of the Customs department at the border village of Ainsley.

"Don't strain your eyes in this light, dear," he was saying. "Besides, I want to talk to you." He laid his hand upon the paper to take it from her. But the girl quickly withdrew it out of his reach.

"You must let me look at the personal column, Leslie," she said teasingly. "I just love it. What do you call it? The 'Agony' column, isn't it?"

"Yes," the man answered, with some show of irritation. "But I want—"

"Of course you do," the girl interrupted. "You want to talk to me—very right and proper. But listen to this."

Grey bit his lip. Prudence bent her face close to the paper and read in a sedate whisper—

"'Yellow boozing—slump in Grey.' Now I wonder what that means? Do you think it's a disguised love message to some forlorn damsel in the east, or does it conceal the heartrending cry of a lost soul to some fond but angry parent?" Then as the man did not immediately answer, she went on with a pucker of thought upon her brow. "'Yellow'—that might mean gold. 'Boozing'—ah, yes, the Kootenai mines, or the Yukon. There is going to be a rush there this year, isn't there? Oh, I forgot," with a real contrition. "I mustn't mention the Yukon, must I? That is where your disaster occurred that caused you to be banished to the one-horned station of Ainsley."

"Not forgetting the reduction of my salary to the princely sum of two thousand dollars per annum," Grey added bitterly.

"Never mind, old boy, it brought us together, and dollars aren't likely to trouble us any. But let me get on with my puzzle. 'Slump in Grey.' That's funny, isn't it? 'Slump' certainly has to do with business.

I've seen 'Slump' in the finance columns of the Toronto *Globe*. And then 'Grey.' That's your name."

"I believe so."

"Um. Guess I can't make much of it. Seems to me it must be some business message. I call it real disappointing."

"Perhaps not so disappointing as you think, sweetheart," Grey said thoughtfully.

"What, do you understand it?" The girl at once became all interest.

"Yes," slowly, "I understand it, but I don't know that I ought to tell you."

"Of course you must. I'm just dying of curiosity. Besides," she went on coaxingly, "we are going to be married, and it wouldn't be right to have any secrets from me. Dear old Gurridge never lost an opportunity of firing sage maxims at us when I used to go to her school. I think the one to suit this occasion ran something like this—

*'Secrets withheld 'twixt man and wife  
Invariably end in coonabal strife.'*

She always made her rhymes up as she went along. She's a sweet old dear, but so funny."

But Grey was not breeding the girl's chatter. His face was serious and his obstinate mouth was tight-shut. He was gazing with introspective eyes at the paper which was now lying in the girl's lap. Suddenly he leaned further forward and spoke almost in a whisper.

"Look here, Prue, I want you to listen seriously to what I have to say. I'm not a man given to undue hopefulness. I generally take my own way in things and see it through, whether that way is right or wrong. So far I've had some successes and more failures. If I were given to dreading or repining I should say Fate was dead against me. That last smasher I came in the mountains, when I lost the Government bullion, nearly settled me altogether, but, in spite of it all, I haven't given up hope yet, and what is more, I anticipate making a big coup shortly which will reinstate me in favour with the heads of my department. My coup is in connection

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with the notice you have just read out from the 'Agony' column."

The girl nodded. She was quite serious now. Grey paused, and the ticking of the grandfather's clock on the other side of the room pounded heavily in the twilight. The murmur of the mid-ladies' voices occasionally reached the lovers, but it did not interrupt them or divert their attention from their own affairs.

"That notice," Grey went on, "has appeared at regular intervals in the paper and is a message to certain agents from a certain man, to say that certain secret work has been carried out. I have discovered who this man is and the nature of his work. It does not matter who he is or what the work, in fact it would be dangerous to mention either, even here, the point is that I have discovered the secret, and I alone, am going to benefit by my discovery. I am not going to let any one share the reward with me. I want to reinstate myself with the authorities, and to regain my lost position, then no one will be able to say things about my marriage with you."

"No one had better say anything against you in my hearing anyway, Louise," the girl put in quickly. "Because I happen to be rich—richer than ever I shall be. I'm nothing to do with any one but myself. As far as I can see it will be a blessing. Go on."

"No doubt it is as you say, dear," the man purred; "but there are plenty of people unkind enough to believe that I am marrying you for your money. However, I am going to get this man and his wife, and, I tell you, it will be the greatest coup of my life."

"I hope you will succeed, Louise," the girl said, her brown eyes fixed in admiration upon her lover. "Do you know I never thought you were such a determined fellow," she added impulsively. "Why, I can almost believe that you'd learn to farm if you took the notice."

Grey's sense of humour was not equal to the occasion, and he took her remark quite seriously.

"A man must be a fool if he can't run a farm," he said roughly.

"Many folks labour under that mistake," the girl replied. Then: "Say, when are you going to do this thing?"

"Strangely enough, the critical moment will come two days after our marriage. Let's see. This is Monday. We are to be married to-morrow week. That will make it Thursday week."

The girl sat herself up on the sofa, and her young face expressed dismay.

"Right in the middle of our honeymoon. Oh, Leslie!"

"It can't be helped, dearest. I shall only be away from you for that afternoon and the night. Think of what it means to me. Everything."

"Ah, yes." She sank back again upon the sofa. There was the faintest glimmer of a smile in the depths of her dark eyes. "I forgot what it meant to you."

The unconscious irony of her words fell upon stony ground.

Prudence Malling was deeply in love with Leslie Grey. How few men fully appreciate the priceless treasure of a good woman's regard.

"If I bring this off it means immediate promotion," Grey went on, in his blindly selfish way. "I must succeed. I hate failure."

"They will take you off the border, then," said the girl musingly. "That will mean—leaving here."

"Which also means a big step up."

"Of course—it will mean a big step up."

The girl sighed. She loved the farm, that home which she had always known. She changed the subject suddenly.

"It must be nearly tea-time. We are going to have tea early, Leslie, so that we can get through with it comfortably before the people come."

"Oh yes, I forgot you are having a 'Progressive Euchre' party to-night. What time does it begin? I mean the party."

"Seven o'clock. But you are going to stay to tea?"

Grey glanced up at the yellow face of the grandfather's clock and shook his head.

"Afraid not, little girl. I've got some work to do in connection with Thursday week. I will drop in about nine o'clock. Who're coming?"

"Is it really necessary, this work?" There was a touch of bitterness in Prudence's voice. But the next

moment she went on cheerfully. She would not allow herself to stand in her lover's way. "The usual people are coming. It will be just our monthly gathering of neighbouring—mossbacks," with a laugh. "The Turners, the Furriers—Peter Furriers, of course, he still hopes to cut you out—and the girl's old Gleichen and his two sons, Harry and Tim. And the Ganthorns from Roachank and their cousins the Covills of Lakesville. And I almost forgot him—mother's flame, George Iredale of Lonely Ranch."

"Is Iredale coming? It's too bad of you to have him here, Prue. Your mother's flame um, I like that! Why, he's been after you for over three years. It's not right to ask him when I am here, besides—" Grey broke off abruptly. Darkness hid the angry flush which had spread over his face. The girl knew he was angry. His tone was raised, and there was no mistaking Leslie Grey's anger. He was very nearly a gentleman, but not quite.

"I think I have a perfect right to ask him, Leslie," she answered seriously. "His coming can make no possible difference to you. Frankly, I like him, but that makes no difference to my love for you. Why you dear, silly thing, if he asked me from now till Doomsday I wouldn't marry him. He's just a real good friend. But still, if it will please you, I don't mind admitting that mother insisted on his coming, and that I had nothing to do with it. That is why I call him mother's flame. Now, then, take that ugly frown off your face and say you're sorry."

Grey showed no sign of obedience, he was very angry. It was believed and put about by the busy bodies of the district, that George Iredale had sought Prudence Malling in marriage ever since she had grown up. He was a bachelor of close upon forty. One of those quiet, determined men, slow of speech, even clumsy, but quick to make up their minds, and endowed with a great tenacity of purpose. A man who rarely said he was going to do a thing, but generally did it. These known features in a man who, up to the time of the announcement of Prudence's engagement to Grey, had been a frequent visitor to the farm, and who was also well known to be

wealthy and more than approved of by Mrs. Malling, no doubt gave a certain amount of colour to the belief of those who chose to pry into their neighbours' affairs.

"Anyway I don't think there is room for both Iredale and myself in the house," Grey went on heatedly. "If you didn't want him you should have put your foot down on your mother's suggestion. I don't think I shall come to-night."

For one moment the girl looked squarely into her lover's face and her pretty lips drew sharply together. Then she spoke quite coldly.

"You will—or I'll never speak to you again. You are very foolish to make such a fuss."

There was a long silence between the lovers. Then Grey drew out his watch, opened it, glanced at the time, and snapped it close again.

"I must go," he said shortly.

Prudence had risen from the sofa. She no longer seemed to heed her lover. She was looking across the darkened room at the homely picture round the glowing stove.

"Very well," she said. And she moved away from the man's side.

The two old ladies pausing in their conversation heard Grey's announcement and the answer Prudence made. Sarah Gurnidge leaned towards her companion with a confidential movement of the head. The two grey heads came close together.

The school-ma'am whispered impressively—

"'Maid who angers faithful swain  
Will shed more tears and know more pain  
Than she who loves and loves in vain.'"

Hephzibah laughed tolerantly. Sarah's earnestness never failed to amuse her.

"My dear," the girl's mother murmured back, when her comfortable laugh had gurgled itself out, "young folks must skit-skat and bicker, or where would be the making up? La, I'm sure when I was a girl I used to tweak my poor Silas's nose for the love of making him angry—Silas had a long nose, my dear, as you may remember. Men hate to be tweaked, especially on their

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weak points. My Silas was always silly about his nose And we never had less than half-an-hour's making up. I wonder how Prudence has tweaked Mr. Grey—I can't bring myself to call him Leslie, my dear."

Prudence had reached her mother's side. The two old heads parted with guilty suddenness.

"Oh, my dear," exclaimed Mrs. Malling, "how you did startle me."

"I'm sorry, mother," the girl said, "but I wanted to tell you that Leslie is not coming to-night," Prudence turned a mischievous face towards her lover.

Mrs. Malling wrinkled up her smooth forehead. She assumed an air of surprise.

"Why not, my child?"

"Oh, because you have asked Mr. Iredale. Leslie says it isn't right."

Prudence was still looking in her lover's direction. He had his back turned. He was more angry than ever now.

"My dears," said her mother with an indulgent smile, "you are a pair of silly noodles. But Mr. Grey—I mean Leslie—must please himself. George Iredale is coming because I have asked him. This house is yours to come and go as you like—er—Leslie. George Iredale has promised to come to the cards to-night. Did I hear you say you were going now? I should have taken it homely if you would have stayed to tea. The party begins at seven, don't forget."

Three pairs of quizzical eyes were fixed upon Grey's good looking but angry face. His anger was against Prudence entirely now. She had made him look foolish before these two ladies, and that was not easily to be forgiven. Grey's lack of humour made him view things in a ponderous light. He felt most uncomfortable under the laughing gaze of those three ladies.

However, he would not give way an inch.

"Yes, I must go now," he said ungraciously. "But not on account of George Iredale," he added blunderingly. "I have some important work to do—"

He was interrupted by a suppressed laugh from Prudence. He turned upon her suddenly, glared, then walked abruptly to the door.

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"Good bye," he exclaimed shortly, and the door closed sharply behind him.

"Why, Prudence," said Mrs. Malling, turning her round laughing face to her daughter and indicating the door. "Aren't you——"

"No, I'm not, mother dear," the girl answered with a forced laugh.

Sarah Gurnidge patted her late pupil's shoulder affectionately. But her head shook gravely as though a weight of worldly wisdom was hers.

"I don't think he'll stay away," said the mother, with a tender glance in the girl's direction.

"He hasn't clung enough," said Sarah, who prided herself upon her understanding of physiognomy.

"Indeed he has," retorted Prudence, who heard the remark.

Mrs. Malling was right. Leslie Grey was not going to stay away. He had no intention of doing so. But his reasons were quite apart from those Mrs. Sarah Malling attributed to him. He wished to see George Iredar, and because of the man's meaning Grey would forego his angry desire to retaliate upon Prudence. He quite ignored what he was pleased to call his own pride in the matter. He would even, because he had what he considered excellent reasons for so doing.

Prudence lit the lamps and laid the table for tea. Her mother ambled off to the great kitchen as fast as her bulk would allow her. There were many things in that wonderful place to see to for the supper, and on these occasions Mrs. Malling would not trust their supervision even to Prudence, much less to the hired girl, Mary. Sarah Gurnidge remained in her seat by the stove watching the glowing embers dreamily, her mind galloping ahead through fanciful scenes of her own imagination. Had she been asked she would probably have stated that she was looking forward into the future of the pair who were so soon to be married.

Prudence went on quietly and nimble with her work. Presently Sarah turned and after a moment's intent gaze at the trim, rounded figure, said in her profoundest tone—

"'Harvest your wheat ere the August frost,  
One breath of cold and the crop is lost.'

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"Oh, bother—there, I've set a place for Leslie," exclaimed Prudence in a tone of vexation. "What is that about 'frost' and 'lost'?"

"Nothing, dear, I was only thinking aloud." And Sarah Gurridge relapsed into silence, and continued to bask in the warm glow of the stove.

## CHAPTER V

### THE RETURN OF THE FROSTBITE

Grey strode away from the house in an very amiable frame of mind. A fenced-in patch, planted with blue-gums and a mass of low-growing shrubs, formed a sort of garden in front of the farm.

This enclosure was devoid of all artistic effect, but in summer-time it served as a screen to break the rigour of the wooden farm-buildings. It was a practical but incongruous piece of man's handiwork, divided down the centre by a pathway bordered with overlapped sprays of bent red willowy switches, which, even in winter, protruded hideously above the beaten snow. The path led to a front gate of primitive and bold manufacture, but stout and serviceable, as was everything else about the farm. And this was the main approach to the house.

It was necessary for Grey, having taken his departure by the front door, to pass out through this gate in order to reach the barn where he had left his saddle-horse. He might have saved himself this trouble by leaving the house by the back door, which opened out directly opposite the entrance to the great barn. But he was in no mood for back doors; the condition of his mind demanded nothing less than a dignified exit, and a dignified exit is never compatible with a back door. Had he left Long Dyke Farm in an amiable frame of mind, much that was to happen in his immediate future might have been different.

But the writing had been set forth, and there was no altering it.

He walked with a great show of unnecessary energy. It was his nature to do so. His energy was almost painful to behold. Too much vigour and energy is

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almost worse than chronic indolence, sooner or later people so afflicted find themselves in difficulties.

It was more than a year since his misadventure in the mountains. He had suffered for his own wrong headedness over that matter, but he had not profited by his experience, he was incapable of doing so. The length of service and reputation for hard work had saved him from dismissal, but Chillingwood was less fortunate, subordinates in Government service generally are less fortunate when their superiors blunder.

However, Grey had survived that unpleasantness. He was not the man to brood over disaster. Soon after he had been transferred to Ainsley the Town Clerkship fell vacant. He did what he could for Chillingwood with the result that the younger man eventually secured the post, and thus found himself enjoying a bare existence on an income of \$600 per annum.

Halfway down the path Grey became aware of a horseman approaching the farm. The figure was moving along slowly over the trail from Ainsley. In the dusk the horse appeared to be jaded, its head hung down, and its gait was unsteady. The stranger was tall, but beyond that Grey could see nothing for the face was almost entirely hidden in the deep collar of his coat. The officer looked hard at the newcomer. It was part of his work to know, at least by sight every inhabitant of his district. This man was quite a stranger to him. The horse was unknown to him, and the figure was unfamiliar. In winter these things usually mark a man out to his acquaintances. The horse shows up against the snow and the prairie man does not usually possess two fur coats.

On the stranger's first appearance Grey's thoughts had at once flown to George Iredale, but now, as he reflected that the man was unknown to him, his interest relaxed. However, he walked slowly on to the gate so that he might obtain a closer inspection. Horse and rider were about twenty-five yards off when Grey reached the gate, and he saw that they were followed at some distance by a great wolfish looking hound.

The evening shadows had grown rapidly. The grey vault of snow-clouds above made the twilight much

darker than usual. Grey waited. The traveller silently drew up his horse, and for a moment sat gazing at the figure by the gate. All that was visible of his face was the suggestion of a nose and a pair of large dark eyes.

Grey sprang the gate and passed out.

"Evening," said the horseman, in a voice muffled by the fur of his coat-collar.

"Good evening," replied Grey shortly.

"Lawn Dyke Farm," said the stranger, in a tone less of inquiry than of making a statement.

Grey nodded, and turned to move away. Then he seemed to hesitate and turned again to the stranger. Those eyes! Where had he seen just such a pair of eyes before? He tried to think, but somehow his memory failed him. The horseman had turned his face towards the house and so the great roving eyes were hidden. But Grey was too intent upon the business he had in hand to devote much thought to anything else.

There was no further reason for remaining, he had satisfied his curiosity. He would learn all about the stranger later on.

He hurried round to the stables. When he had gone the stranger dismounted, for a moment or two he stood with one hand on the gate and the other holding the horse's reins, gazing off at the retreating form of the Customs officer. He waited until the other had disappeared, then leisurely lashed his horse's reins on to the fence of the enclosure, and, passing in through the gate, approached the house. Presently he saw Grey ride away, and a close observer might have detected the sound of a heavy sigh escaping from between the embrassing folds of the fur collar as the man walked up the path and tapped loudly upon the front door with his mittened fist. The three footed hound had closed up on his master, and now stood beside him.

Prudence opened the door. Tea was just ready; and she answered the summons, half expecting to find that her lover had thought better of his ill humour and had returned to share the evening meal. She drew back well within the house when she realized her mistake. The stranger stood for one second as though in doubt, then his voice reached the waiting girl.

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"Prudence, isn't it?"

The girl started. Then a smile broke over her pretty dark face.

"Why it's Hervey, brother Hervey. Here, mother," she called back into the house. "Quick here's a Hervey. Why, you dear boy, I didn't expect you for at least a week, and then I didn't *know* you would come. You got my letter safely then, and you must have started off almost at once; you're a real good brother to come as soon. Yes, in here, tea is just ready. Take off your coat. Come along, mother," she called out again joyously. "Hurry, come as fast as you can. Hervey is here." And she ran away towards the kitchen. Her mother's movements were far too slow to suit her.

The man removed his coat, and voices reached him from the direction of the kitchen.

"Dearest me, but, child, you do rush one about so. Where is he? There, you've left the door open, and where is that horrid brute of a dog? Why, it looks like a timber wolf. Send him out!"

Mrs. Malling talked far more rapidly than she walked, or rather trotted, under the force of her daughter's bursting excitement. Hervey went out into the hall to meet her bounding framed in the doorway to see her dog.

"Get out, you brute," he shouted and stepping quickly up to the animal he launched a cruel kick at it which caught it squarely on the chest. The beast turned suddenly away without a sound, and Hervey closed the door.

The mother was the first to meet him. Her stout arms were outstretched, while her face beamed with pride, and her eyes were filled with tears of joy.

"My dear dear boy," she exclaimed, smiling happily. Hervey made no reciprocal movement. He merely bent his head down to her level and caressed her to kiss her cheek. She clung him forcefully to her ample bosom, an embrace from which he quickly released himself. Her words then poured forth in a sort of incoherent flow. "And to think I believed that I should never see you again. And how you have grown and filled out. Just like your father. And where have you been all the time, and have you kept well? Look at the tea on his face, Prudence, and the beard too. Why, I should hardly

have known you, boy. If I hadn't 's known who it was. Why, you must be inches taller than your father for sure—and he was a tall man. But you must tell me all about yourself when the folks are all gone to-night. We are having a party, you know. And isn't it nice?—you will be here for Prudence's wedding. —"

"Don't you think we'd better go into the parlour instead of standing out here?" the girl interrupted practically. Her mother's rambling remarks had shown no sign of cessation, and the tea was waiting. "Hervey must be tired and hungry."

"Well, I must say 's I am utterly worn out," the man replied with a laugh. "Yes, mother, if tea is ready let's come along. We can talk during the meal."

They passed into the parlour. As they seated themselves at the table Sarah Gurnidge joined them from her place beside the stove. Hervey had not noticed her presence when he first entered the room, and the good school maid quietly day-dreaming had barely awakened to the fact of his coming. Now she, too, joined in the enthusiasm of the moment.

"Ah, Hervey," she said, with that complacent air of proprietorship which our early preceptors invariably assume, "you haven't forgotten me, I know.

"Though the tempest of life will oft shake out the past,  
The thoughts of our school days remain to the last."

"Glad to see you, Mrs. Gurnidge. No, I haven't forgotten you," the man replied.

A slight pause followed. The women folk had so much to say that they hardly knew where to begin. That trifling hesitation might have been accounted for by this fact. Or it might have been that Hervey was less overjoyed at his home-coming than were his mother and sister.

Prudence was the first to speak.

"Funny that I should have set a place more than I intended at the tea-table," she said, "and funnier still that when I found out what I'd done I didn't remove the plate and things. And now you turn up." She laughed joyously.

Sarah Gurnidge looked over in the girl's direction and shook an admonitory forefinger at her.

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"Mr. Grey, my dear—you were thinking of Mr. Grey, in spite of your lover's till?"

"Who did you say?" asked Hervey, with a quiet glance at Prudence.

"Leave Grey," said his mother, before the odd school maid could reply. " Didn't our Prudence tell you when she wrote? He's the man she's going to marry. I must say he's not the man I should have set on for her, but she's got her own ploughing to seed and I'm not the one to say her 'nay' when she chooses her man."

Hervey buried himself with his food, nor did he look up when he spoke.

"That was Grey, I suppose, I saw riding away as I came up? Good, square set chunk of a man."

"Yes, he left just before you came," said Prudence.

"But never mind about him, brother. Tell me about yourself. Have you made a fortune?"

"For sure, he must," said their mother, gazing with round, proud eyes upon her boy, "for how else came he to travel from California to here just to set his eyes on us and see a slip of a girl take to herself a husband? My, but it's a great journey for a boy to take!"

"Nothing to what I've done in my time," replied Hervey. "Besides, mother, I've got further to go yet. And as for sister Prudence's marriage, I'm afraid I can't stay for that."

"Not stay?" exclaimed his mother.

"Do you mean it?" asked his sister incredulously.

Sarah Gueridge contented herself with looking her dismay.

"You see, it's like this," said Hervey. He had an uncomfortable habit of keeping his eyes fixed upon the table, only just permitting himself occasional swift upward glances over the other folk's heads. "When I got your letter, Prudence, I was just preparing to come up from Los Mares to go and see a big fruit grower at Agua. The truth is that my fruit farm is a failure and I am trying to sell it."

"My poor boy!" exclaimed his mother; "and you never told me. But there, you were always as proud as proud and never would let me help you. Your poor father was just the same, when things went wrong he

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wouldn't own up to any one. I remember how we lost many acres of forty bushel, No. 1 wheat with an August frost. I never learned it till we'd taken in the flax crop in the district at the next harvesting. But you didn't put all your savings into fruit?"

"I'm afraid I did, mother, worse luck."

"All you made up at the Yukon goldfields?" asked Prudence, alarm in her voice.

"Every cent."

There followed a dead silence.

"Then—?" Mrs. Malling could get no further.

"I'm broke—dead broke. And I'm going East to sell my land to pay off my debts. I've had an offer for it, and I'm going to clinch the deal quick. Say, I just came along here to see you and I'm going on at once. I only got into Winnipeg yesterday. I rode out without delay, but struck the Ainsley trail, or I should have been here sooner. Now, see here, mother," Hervey went on, as a woe-begone expression closely verging on tears came into the old dame's eyes, "it's no use crying over this business. What's done is done. I'm going to get clear of my farm first and maybe afterwards I'll come here again and we'll talk things over a bit."

Prudence set start, at her brother, but Hervey avoided her gaze. Mrs. Malling was too heartbroken to speak yet. Her weather-tanned face had blanched as much as it was possible for it to do. Her boy had gone out upon the world to seek his fortune, and he had succeeded in establishing himself, he had written and told her. He had found gold in quantities in the Yukon valley, and now now at last, he had failed. The shock had for the moment crushed her, her boy, her proud independent boy as she had been wont to consider him, had failed. She did not ask herself, or him, the reason of his failure. Such failure, she felt, must be through no fault of his, but the result of adverse circumstances.

She never thought of the gambling-table. She never thought of reckless living. Such things could not enter her simple mind and be in any way associated with her boy. Hephzibah Malling loved her son, to her he was the king who could do no wrong. She continued to gaze blankly in the man's direction.

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Sarah Gurridge awoke of the trio allowed herself sidelong, speculative glances at the man's face. She had seen the furtive overhand glances, the steady avoidance of the loving admiration of his woman-kind. She had known Hervey as well, and perhaps just a shade better than his mother and sister had, and long since, in his childhood school days, she had detected a lurking weakness in an otherwise good character. She wondered now if he had lived to outgrow that juvenile trait, or had it grown with him, gaining strength as the greater passions of manhood developed?

After the first shock of Hervey's announcement had passed, Mrs. Mallings sought refuge in the consolation of her own ability to help her son. He must never know want, or suffer the least privation. She could and would give him everything he needed. Besides, after all, she argued with womanly feeling, now perhaps she could persuade him to look after the farm for her, to stay by her side. He should be in no way dependent. She could install him as manager at a comfortable salary. The idea pleased her beyond measure, and it was with difficulty she could keep herself from at once putting her proposal into words. However, by a great effort, she checked her enthusiasm.

"Then when do you think of going East?" she asked, with some trepidation. "You won't go at once, sure?"

"Yes, I must go at once," Hervey replied promptly. "That is, to-morrow morning."

"Then you will stay to-night," said Prudence.

"No, but only to get a good long sleep and rest my horse. I'm thoroughly worn out. I've been in saddle since early this morning."

"Have you sent your horse round to the barn?" asked Sarah Gurridge.

"Well, no. He's hatched to the fence." The observing Sarah had been sure of it.

Prudence rose from her seat and called out to the hired girl—

"Mary, send out and tell Andy to take the horse round to the barn. He's hatched to the fence." Then she came back. "You'll join our party to-night, of course."

"Hatty, girl, of course not," said their mother. "How's

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he had gone to get rest gallivanting with a lot of down-  
who can only talk of 'flowers' and 'jokers'?" You  
think of nothing but 'how de do' with your bright  
bairns, and you're going to be unsewed. Things were  
different in my day. I'll look after Hervey," she em-  
phasized firmly. "You shi have a good night,  
lad or my name's not Hepzibah Moong. Ma be you'll  
tell me by and by what you'd like to do."

"I like night, mother," replied Hervey, with an air  
of relief. "You understand what it is for a man to  
need rest. I'll be chargin' around till the folks come, and  
you can sleep to bed. You don't mind, Prue, do you? I'm  
tired out, and I want to leave at daybreak."

"Not at all," answered Prudence. "rest—rest. I'll see  
to it. I have asked you to meet Mr. Grey, but you must  
get your rest."

"I need your mother," said Hervey. "and as for me to see  
Mr. Grey—well, your brother won't sicken for want of  
any advice I'll give him. Come along Hervey, and go to the  
kitchen. Prue has to get her best parlour ready  
for these chattering visitors. And, miss, I'm going to  
her—alone, with an expression of pretended severity.  
Don't forget that I've put a batch o' lover cakes in the  
oven already. So tell 'em what you want in the way  
of drinks. The young folks never think of the comforts  
I consider. I don't know what you'd do without your mother,  
miss. Some of these times your carelessness will cost your  
parties muckle a lauding stock of. Come along Hervey."

The old lady beat her out, bearing her son off in triumph  
to the kitchen. She was quite happy again now. Her  
scheme for her son's welfare had shot out all thoughts of his  
badness. Most women are like this, the joy of giving to  
the known is perhaps the greatest joy in the life of a mother.

In the hall they met the flying agitated figure of the  
lored girl, Mary.

"Oh, please, I'm there's such a racket going on by the  
barn. There's Andy on the two dogs barking with a  
great strange three-legged dog who looks like a wolf.  
The wolf I mean I up that I don't know I'm sure."

"It's that brute Neche of mine," said Hervey, with  
an impatience. "It's all right, girl, I'll go."

Hervey rushed out to the barn. The great three-legged

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savage was in the midst of a frenzied snarl. Two farm dogs were attacking him. They were both half-bred sheep-dogs. One was making futile efforts to get a hold upon the steamer, and Neche was chasing the other as a terrier would chase a rat. And Andy, the choreman, was lambasting the intruder with the business end of a two-toe hay fork, and shouting frightful curses at him in a strong American accent.

As Hervey came upon the scene, Neche hauled his victim from him, either dead or dying, for the dog lay quite still where it fell upon the snow. Then he turned to the onslaught of the choreman. "I scared the other dog," "Come out of it, Andy," cried Hervey.

The hired man ceased his efforts at once, glad to be done with the savagery. Hervey then ran up to the snarled husky and dealt him three or three feet back and forth.

The dog turned round instantly. His tongue was dripping with blood and he quivered fearfully, his bared fangs glistening with frost. But he shrank off when he recognized his assailant, giving the record dog time to run for its life, howling with canine fear.

Andy went over to the dog that was stretched upon the snow.

"Course I've done, boss," he said, looking at just Hervey as the latter came over to his side. "See, that's where the shiestest scrappin' round these parts. See whiz, I went for me like the tail end o' a cyclone when I took your plug to the barn. It was they ears that kind o' distracted his attention. Mebbe that's more wolf nor dog in him. Mebbe, I say."

"Yes, he's a devil-tempered husky," said Hervey. "I'll have to shoot him one of these days."

"Well, I do know that it's a mercy he ain't got no more'n three shanks. Mackinaw, but he's handy."

The four women had watched the scene from the kitchen door. Hervey came over to where they were standing.

"I'm sorry, mother," he said. "Neche has killed one of your dogs. He's a hound for fightin'. I've a good mind to shoot him now."

"No, don't go for to do that" said his mother. "We oughtn't to have sent Andy to take your horse. I suspect the beast thought he was doing right."

"He's a brute. Curse him!"

Mrs. Malling said nothing. Now she moved a little away from the house and turned to the dog. He was placidly lying on the snow, showing no sign of resistance, lying down and barking blearily on one of his front legs. He occasionally shook his great head, and stained the snow with the darkish crimson from his fierce looking ears. Hervey's first impression at the sound of the girl's voice did not last. Her tone was gentle and caressing. Hervey suddenly called to her.

"Don't go near him. He's as treacherous as a dog can be."

"Come back," called out her mother.

The girl paid no attention. She called again, and attired her blue apron encouragingly. The animal rose slowly to his feet, looked down at her in her direction, then without any display of enthusiasm, came slowly towards her. His limp added to his wicked aspect, but he came on, and did he stop until his head was resting against her dress, and her hand was caressing his great back. The poor creature seemed to appreciate the girl's attitude, for he made no attempt to move away. It is probable that this was the first caress the dog had ever known in his savage life.

Hervey looked on and scratched his beard thoughtfully, but he said nothing more. Mrs. Malling went back to the kitchen. Sarah Conridge alone had anything to say.

"Poor creature," she observed, in tones of deep pity. "I wonder how he lost his foot. Is he always fighting? A poor companion, I should say."

Hervey laughed unpleasantly.

"Oh, he's not so bad. He's savage, and all that. But he's a good friend."

"Ah, and a deadly enemy. I suppose he's very fond of you. He lets you kick him" she added significantly.

"I hardly know—and I must say I don't much care—what his feelings are towards me. Yes, he lets me kick him." Then, after a pause, "But I think he really hates me."

And Hervey turned abruptly and went back into the kitchen. He preferred the more pleasant atmosphere of his mother's admiration to the serious reflections of Sarah Conridge.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE PROGRESSIVE RECREATION PARTY

THE Millings always had a good gathering at their card parties. Such form of entertainment and dancing were the chief winter amusement of these prairie-bred folks. A twenty mile drive in a box sled, the sleds buried beneath heavy fur robes, and in a long, cold, deep, blizzard of sweet smelling hay, made of seats made the journey as comfortable as a topographical as well the luxurious brougham in the wind by either of the two. There was little thought of display among the farmers of Manitoba. When they went to a party, the primary object was enjoyment, and they generally contrived to attain their desire at these gatherings. But nows were chafers taken in parties, and the amount of money so obtained in the bottom of a box sled would be sufficient to those without such experience. There was a sort of blust about the simple country folk. A hard day's work was nothing to them. They would follow it up by an evening's enjoyment with the keenest appreciation, and they knew how to revel with the best.

The last to arrive at Les a Dyke Farm were the Furries, Dorothy, Fortine and Huel, three girls of round proportions, all dressed alike, and of age ranging in the region of twenty. They spoke well and frequently, and their lancing eyes and ready laugh indicated spirits at current pitch. True there were great friends of Mrs. Furrier, and were loud in their admiration of her. Peter Furrier, their brother, was with them, he was a red faced boy of about seventeen, a giant of flesh, and a pigmy of intellect, outside of farming operations. Mrs. Furrier was unjoined the party as chaperon, for even in the West chaperons are recognized as useful adjuncts, and besides enjoyment is not always a question of age.

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Following closely on the heels of the butters came the  
cousins and his two sons, Tim and Harry. Gretchen was  
a woman of the "mixed" farmer—a woman who was her  
husband's partner, but not at all as he was. She  
and the boys were less of the prairie than their mother. They  
had been educated at St. John's University in Winona.  
There was no university built by Order, and already  
they had a mission to the small neighboring village  
at Elkhorn. Tim acted as farm manager for a  
series of enterprises, and whenever he hesitated  
about his business he was a young parent the advantage of  
devoting himself to stock-raising.

He remained—each succession, a truly agricultural  
farmer. At first the intent of the wife, after  
she had given birth to her son, was to bring up  
a family of the most desirable means, and money imports  
from the Old Country.

By half past seven everybody had arrived with the  
exception of George Irredale and Leslie Grey. The fun  
began from the very first.

The dining-table had disappeared from the parlour, and the rug from the floor, and a thick layer of white  
was down, a silent fall of snow, lying invitingly on the  
bare pine boarding. And, too, it seemed only natural that the moment she came into the room ready  
for the tray, Mrs. Forrester should make a rush for it  
without pause, and, tuck out with fair exertion the  
strains of an old waltz. Her effects broke up any sign  
of course, everybody knew everybody else, so they  
danced. This was the beginning, and would come later.

They might all have had right well too, but  
beyond all the attracting aspects of powder, quicksilver  
shines with the extreme complexion, the want of all traces of  
wrinkles and the teeth, all glowed with a healthy hue  
and shone with perfect happiness. There could be no  
doubt that Gretchen and her mother knew their world  
as well as any two could wish. And it was all so  
easy, so simple, so peaceful to observe, just free  
and easy, free fellowship.

When Gretchen came to the rescue of the kitchen  
she was the heated with her exertions, and a string  
of grey hairs escaping from beneath her quizzet

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her cap testified to her culinary exertions. She had been stooping at her oven, regardless of her appetite, etc. She found her daughter staring gloomily at the door of the parlour occupied in a dress. A visitor stood by a Peter Putter. Prudence had told her mother with a sort of real and the roundabout tact, she needn't say, away.

"Oh mother dear, what bad day you are having the girl, gazing at her vanity. And when you have come I took with your cap. Look at it now. It's all crooked side, and your hair is sticking out like the crooked grass. Stand still while I fix it."

The girl with a flagitious air arranged her to look like the old lady, a fidgeting all the while, but with infinite patience to the operation.

"There there, you're been thinking of nothing but patching and putting and trifling. Is it to be said then I was going to sit down at the window and gaze at the minister of the Church. Nobody's going to look at me, I said, until the octogenarian comes. He does what does it matter with neighbours? Look at me, I'll show you their bowing and scraping to Mrs. Gantmore, one would think it was on his way to do something else. He's less elaborate when he's trailing after his parson. My but I can't abide such pretending. Guess some of us think worse are bound. And where's George Tredele? I don't see him. Now there'd be some excuse for his doing the girl. He's a gentleman born and bred."

"Ah yes, mother, we all know your weaknesses for Mr. Tredele," replied Prudence, with an affectionate smile, & put to the grey old head. "But then he just wouldn't own and escape 'as you call it' to Mrs. Gantmore or anybody else. He's not the sort for that kind of thing. He hasn't come yet. I'm telling him to you at once, dear, when he arrives," she finished up with a laugh.

"You're a saucy bairny," her mother returned, with a chuckle. Then "But I'd have taken to him as a son. Girls never learn anything from a boy, and they're married to the man they fancy."

"Nothing like persons, you once lady to be. Do you ask any one's advice when you marry?"

"That I didn't for sure, child, but it was different. Your father, Susan, wasn't the man to be put off with any

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nothing. He just said he was going to marry me—and he did marry me. I was all sort of excited off my feet.

"I told you there was a fool in you," persisted the girl laughingly.

"Well, maybe I did, child, maybe I did."

"At least you didn't regret your own choice, mother? So why should I?"

"Ah, it was different with me—quite different. Ah here's some one coming in." Hepzibah Malling turned as she spoke, glad to be sure to change the subject. The outer door was opened and a fur-clad figure entered.

It was George Iredale, she went on, as the man removed his cap and displayed a crown of dark brown hair, his grey hair and there with grey, a broad high forehead and a pair of serious eyes.

"Come along, George," Mrs. Malling hustled forward, followed by her daughter. "I thought you couldn't get, maybe. The folks are all dancing and dallying. You must come into the kitchen first and have something warm. It's a cold night."

"I thought to come earlier," replied the new arrival, in a deep, quiet voice. "Unfortunately, just as I was about to start, word was brought to me that an especially exciting horseman was hovering round. You see my master is so exact that any arrival has to be inquiries into. There is nothing in these themes and to her die grace and character about me. I have to be careful. Well I thought to myself, who the intruder was, but I lost him. That is, I saw him. He was very tall and I daresay too, though I only saw either of you. Yes, something I daresay, a kind of a long water-ugle."

George Iredale had divested himself of his coat and stockings, and now stood in his harness to the waist. His shoulders, of course, a leonine, big and strong of feature, indeed. He was powerful by birth, although his father, though of the race to a large extent, of his heredity, had been a bony man. He had a strong, even, pale face that was very large featured and would naturally have been a want of only size but for an expression of life, his eyes, not indeed very bright, but of unusual expressiveness. It was the face of a man in whom women like to place confidence, and with whom men never attempt to

feel themselves. He was powerful by birth, although his father, though of the race to a large extent, of his heredity, had been a bony man. He had a strong, even, pale face that was very large featured and would naturally have been a want of only size but for an expression of life, his eyes, not indeed very bright, but of unusual expressiveness. It was the face of a man in whom women like to place confidence, and with whom men never attempt to

take libertam. He had too, a charm of manner unequalled in men, losing the rough edge of the native.

The hawking strain of the voice had ceased, and the silence went back to the parlour. She felt that it was high time to set the table for "piggy's" supper. It was past eight and they had not turned up. She began to think he intended carrying out his threat of staying away. Well, if he chose to do so, he could. She would not ask him to do otherwise. She sat unhappy at him in spite of her brave thoughts.

Her announcement of cards was received with delight and the guests departed with a rush to wash up, for a sufficient number of small tables to accommodate the requirements of the game.

In the kitchen George Pendle was alone, sipping a steaming glass of tea which he held. He was wearing a light high-necked farm-labourer's waistcoat from the big oak stove at which Hepzibah Malung was passing. Many letters and packages were standing on the black iron top and the waxed old parrot perched on it.

He was fond of stories which told the old farm-women most wretched fare. Mrs. Malung was however, and did not interrupt her. "I have not got the letter yet. It was a great blow to me."

"It's like his poor father in some ways," she was saying, as she lifted a batch of small oranges out of the oven and moved towards the table with them. "He never concealed about his misfortune from me. 'Not one letter, and I get asking for help. This proof is there. And now I don't know, I'm sure!'"

She paused with her hand on the open door of the kitchen, and looked back into the parlour.

"Do you think you any better off than I am? What a respecter I am for it?" Pendle asked, putting his glass on one of the small tables of his chair.

"No, that he did not see that," in a tone of pride. "He just said he'd faced it, but he was 'there.' He's too honest a chap with the things he's got. You'd keep right here—or you should bear it from the top up. He never blamed no one."

"Ah, and you are going to help him, Mrs. Malung. What are you going to do?"

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"That's where I'm bound to come. Money he can have—all he wants."

Iredale shook his head gravely.

"Wait just a minute, Mrs. Mowring. Until you know all the facts."

"What are you back and blacked up? What's the—"

"I know what you're going to say, but you're right, and I'm afraid I'll have to tell the black-faced aspect of fact and the angry aspects that they do it the good. I know, I know, much that it does not do them good. Money, money, money! After all, fruit-farming is a lottery in which he can't go to those who take the most tickets. I rather think he's a good fellow, Mrs. Mowring. A good man may end his days through the fault of his own carelessness. The other man may have a better chance by reason of his carelessness. Now I should take it you could do better for yourself by knowing all the facts, setting them out and then deciding what to do. No expense or trouble will be spared to help you out. What will it be?"

A spark of resentment had lit Mrs. Mowring's face. She repeated her question and returned to the place standing before her guest with her hands buried deeply in her apron pockets and a delighted smile on her face.

"That's just what I thought all along," she said. "You're real smart George, who not the farm? I know that he's not a fit gift. If I wouldn't do better, I know but there's drawbacks. You drawbacks. He's not much for the petticoats, meaning his own, Mrs. Mowring, to play second fiddle to me to speak. Now while I like the farm is mine, and I wanted my boy to come up who could teach me, my Son. Now I'd make Henry my foreman and give him a good wage. He'd have all he wants, but he'd have to be my foreman." The old lady shook her head firmly.

"And you think Henry wouldn't accept a subordinate position?"

"He's that proud. Just like my poor Silas," continued the mother.

"Then he's a fool. But you try him," Iredale said dryly.

"Do you think he might?"

"You never can tell."

"I wouldn't know if you—yes, I'll ask him."

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"Offer it to him, you mean." George Iredale smiled quizzically.

"Yes, offer it to him," the old lady corrected herself thoughtfully. "But I am forgetting my stewing oysters and Mistress Prudence will get it all on for the had them sent up all the way from St. John's if they're burned. She turned to one of the kettles and began stirring at once. "Henry is coming back after he's been to Niagara, and I'll talk to him to it. I wish you could have seen him before he went but he's absent."

"Never mind, there's time enough when he comes back. Ah, Prudence how is the engine progressing?" Iredale turned as the girl came hurriedly in.

"Oh, here you are. You two getting on usual. Mother, it's a bit bad of you to cut me off my guests. Didn't I come to ask for more lemonade?"

"Dip it out of your jar as a child. And you can take the rest off at once. It's high time he got at the cards."

"He's too late. The game is nearly over. I'd have to sit out with Leslie. It's also was too late. Come along, Mr. Iredale, and help fill the lemonade pitcher."

"And mother who always to be ready with a hospitable gesture. You've got to come and give out the prizes to the winners before that."

"Aye to the losers," put in Iredale.

"Yes, they must all have prizes. What time, mother?"

"In an hour. And be off the pair of you. Mary! Mary!" the old lady called out, moving towards the summer bit beg. "Hasten about girl, and count down the plates from the dresser. I a look at you, she went on, as the hired girl came running in, "where's the cap I gave you? And for good a morsel's sake go and scrub your hands. My but girls be jades!"

Iredale and Prudence went off to the parlour. The game was nearly over, and the guests were laughing and chattering merrily. The excitement was intense. Leslie Grey sat aloof. He was engaged in a pretence of conversation with Sarah Gurnidge, but I judge by the expression of his face his temper was still sulky or his thoughts were far away. The moment Iredale entered the room Grey's face lit up with something like interest.

Prudence, accompanying the teacher, was quick to

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observe the change. She had been prepared for something of the sort with such the power she assigned to his sister. It was very late when she came late herself as he had to go to work to the last. He had stayed the evening past at the latter in proportion. And after the poor lad had been gone, the poor man settled himself out just such a repast as those people could afford upon costs. The delicate Mrs. Mc—offered her guests were so willing to be received in the small no-party and even her enemies, for she had a very kind heart, admitted that to you, Mr. Grey, she was soon amongst the proudest was it to receive the highest offer.

After supper the old man, who spoke more or a smile or face disengaged himself from the room. The younger men followed to a stand with him which was usual set aside on these occasions for the use of those who used to smoke. Fredale, who had been talking to Grey, falling and who had been watching for this opportunity, quickly followed.

He hardly believed that Fredale came to the farm to turn his attention upon Prudent. This was an experiment enough in itself but when Grey in his right arm, again, the rest of the room, referring to the owner of Henry Ranch, his indulgent master to be long past. He meant to have it out with him to-night.

Fredale had already adjusted himself into a comfortable chair covered armchair when Grey arrived upon the scene. A great broad pipe being from the corner of his strong, decided nose. And he was smoking thoughtfully.

Grey moved briskly to another chair and lung himself into its depths with little regard for its age. Nor did he attempt to smoke. His mind was too active and disturbed for anything so calm and nothing.

His first words indicated the condition of his mind.

"Kicking up a racket in there," he said jerkily indicating the parlour. "Can't stand such a house when I've got a lot to think about."

"No," Fredale nodded his head and up he without removing the pipe from his mouth,

"We are to be married to-morrow week. Prudent and I."

## 60 THE HOUND FROM THE NORTH

"So I've been told. I congratulate you!"

Iredale looked at his companion with grave eyes. They were quite alone in the room. He had met him frequently and had learned to understand his ways and to know his bold but tactless methods. Now he quietly waited. He had a shrewd suspicion that the man had something unpleasant to say. Unconsciously his teeth closed tighter upon his pipe.

Grey raised his eyebrows.

"Thanks. I hardly expected it."

"And why not?" Iredale was smiling. His grey eyes had a curious look in them—something between quizzical amusement and surprise.

"Oh, I don't know," the other retorted with a shrug. "There is no telling how some men will like these things."

Iredale removed his pipe and pressed the ash down with his little finger. He permitted a momentary lowering of his eyes from his companion's face.

"I don't think I understand you."

Grey laughed unpleasantly.

"There's not much need of comprehension. If two men run after the same girl and one succeeds where the other fails, the successful man doesn't usually expect congratulations from his unluckier rival."

"Supposing such to be the case in point," Iredale replied quietly, but with an ominous lowering of his eyebrows. "Mark you, I only say 'supposing.' I admit nothing to you. The less successful man may surely be honest enough, and man enough to wish his rival well. I have known such cases among—men."

Grey twisted himself round in his chair and assumed a truculent attitude.

"Notwithstanding the fact that the rival in question never loses an opportunity of seeking out the particular girl, and continuing his attentions after she is engaged to the other? That may be the way among—men. But not honest men."

The expression of Iredale's face remained quite calm. Only his eyes, keen, direct-gazing eyes, lit up with an angry sparkle. He drew a little more rapidly at his pipe, perhaps, but he spoke quietly still. He quite understood that Grey intended forcing a quarrel upon him.

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"I shall not pretend to misunderstand you, Grey. Your manner puts that out of the question. You are unmercifully accusing me of a most unpardonable proceeding. Such an accusation being made by any one—

"What shall I say?" more resolute than you. I should take considerable notice of, as it is, it is hardly worth my consideration. You are at best a blunderer. I should pause before I replied had I the inclination to be you, and try to reflect where you are. If you wish to quibble there is time and place for a long—

Tredale's words stung Leslie Grey to the quick. His nerves—still temper fairly jumped within him. His eyes glared with rage, and he could scarcely find words to express himself.

"You may say as much as you like," he said, with abrupt frankness, "but you cannot deny that you're very fond of this house we paid with the object of addressing my affianced wife. You are right when you describe such conduct as ungentlemanly. You are no gentleman! But I can not suppose that the man who owns *Lonely Ranch* will feel the same about doing considerable as a friend or anything else."

"Step!" Tredale was roused, at. There was no mistaking the set of his square jaw and the composure between his brows. "You have gone a step too far. You shall apologize or—"

"Step! Step! You may well demand that I should stop. My God!—see Tredale. Were I to go on you would have a distinctly bad time of it. But one instant's consideration is not with the concerns of *Lonely Ranch*. Only we bairns visits here, which shall cease from to-day out. And as for apologize for anything I have said I'll see you damned first."

There was a short, a breathless pause. The two men confronted each other with Tredale by a strength which a moment ago would have seemed impossible to at least one of them.

Grey's face worked in a fully visible suppressed effort of restraint. But he grappled himself to the pipe. The pipe was clenched under the effect of swift thought. He was the first to break the silence and he did so in a voice which modulated and under perfect control. But the mouthpiece of his pipe was nearly bitten through.

## 70 THE HOUND FROM THE NORTH

"Now I shall be glad if you will go on. You apparently have further charges to make against me. I have a hunch whether I am in the presence of a madman or a fool. One or the other, I am sure. You may as well make your charges at once. You will certainly answer for all you have already said, so make the best of your reputation complete before me."

"You fool!" hissed Grey, gnawed to the last extremity of patience. His hunting nature could not long endure restraint. Now his words came with a blood-curdling roar.

"Do you think I'd speak so threatfully being sure of my ground? Do you think because other men who have occupied the position which you now at Ainsley have seen off that I am?" Lonely Ranch, a fitting title for your house, with a secret. "Lonely" in neighbour's choice, yes, but not as regards its owner. You are wealthy, probably the wealthiest man in the province of Manitoba, why, that alone should have been sufficient to set the bounds of the law on your trail. I know the secret of Lonely Ranch. I have watched day after day the notices you have inserted in the *Free Press*. 'Yellow boomerang - clump in Grey.' Nor have I rested until I discovered your secret. I shall make no charge here beyond what I have said, but—"

He suddenly broke off, awakening from his blind rage to the fact of what he was doing. His mouth shut like a trap, and beads of perspiration broke out upon his forehead. His eyes lowered before the imminent gaze of his companion. Thus he sat for a moment a prey to futile regrets. His anger had undone him. The sound of a short laugh fell into his ears, and as though drawn by a magnet his eyes once more turned on the face of the rancher.

"I was not sure which it was," said Fred dryly, "whether you were a fool or a madman. Now I know I had better that it was madness. There is hope for a man, but none for a fool. Thank you, Grey, for the moment you have afforded me with. You'll be defeated, your ends. Remember this. You will never be able to see the 'Secret' as you are pleased to call it, of Lonely Ranch. I will take good care of that. And now, as I hear four or five people running upstairs,

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we will postpone further discussion. This interview has been prolonged sufficiently—more than sufficient for you."

Iredale rose from his chair; to all appearance he was quite undisturbed. Grey's condition was exactly the reverse.

He, too, rose from his seat. There was a sound of some one approaching the door. Grey stepped up to his companion and put his mouth close to his ear.

"Don't forget that you cannot conceal the traces that are round your—each. Traces which are unmistakable to those who have an inkling of the truth."

"No, but I can take steps which will effectually nullify the exertions you have been put to. Remember you said I was wealthy. I am tired of your stupid long-winded talk."

Iredale turned away with a movement of disgust and irritation just as the door opened and Prudener came in.

"Ah, here you are, you two. I have been wondering where you were all this time. Do you know the people are going home?"

The girl ceased speaking abruptly and looked keenly at the two men before her. Iredale was smiling. Grey was gazing down at the stove, and apparently not listening to her.

Prudener saw that something was wrong, but she had no suspicion of the truth. She wondered, then she delivered a message she had brought and dismissed Iredale.

"Mother wants to see you, Mr. Iredale, something about Hervey."

"I will go to her at once. And the owner of *Lonely Ranch* passed out of the room.

The moment the door closed child him the girl turned anxiously to her lover.

"What is it, Leslie dear? You are not angry with me still?"

The man laughed mirthlessly.

"Angry? No, child. I wonder if I—no, better not. It's time to be off. Give me a kiss, and I'll say good night."

## CHAPTER VII

### LESTER GREY FULFILS HIS DESTINY

It was early morning. Early even for the staff of the Rodney House Hotel. And Lester Grey was about to breakfast. The solitary waitress the hotel boasted was laying the tables for the eight-o'clock meal. The room had not yet assumed the spick and span appearance which it would wear later on. There was a suggestion of last night's supper about the atmosphere; and the girl, too, who moved swiftly here and there arranging the tables, was still clad in her early morning, frowsy print dress, and her hair showed signs of having been hastily powdered with the aid of a looking-glass. A sight of her arrested me abrupt rising at the latest possible moment.

From the kitchen beyond a savoury odour of steak and coffee penetrated the green baize swing-door which stood at one end of the room.

"Is that steak nearly ready?" asked Grey irritably, as the girl flicked some crumbs from the opposite end of her napkin to the floor, with the deft flourish of a dirty napkin which waitresses usually obtain.

She paused in her work, and her hand went up automatically to the screws of paper which adorned her front hair.

"Yes sir, it'll be along right now."

Then she continued to flick the table in other directions. "I ordered breakfast for six o'clock. This is the blackest, bee I ever knew. I shall talk to Morton and see if things can't be altered. Just go and rouse that cook up. I've got to make Leavenworth two."

The girl gave a final weary flick at an imaginary crumb and flounced off in the direction of the kitchen. The next moment her shrill voice was heard addressing the cook.

"Mr. Grey wants his breakfast—sharp, Molly. Dish it up. If it ain't done it's his look-out. There's no pleasing some folks. I suppose Mr. Chillingwood 'll be along pretty. Better put something on for him or there'll be a row. What's that steak? That won't no good for Mr. Robb. He wants pork chops. He never eats anything else for breakfast. Says he's used to pork."

The girl returned to the breakfast room bearing Grey's steak and some potatoes. Coffee foil wed quickly, and the officer attacked his viands hungrily. Then Robt Chillingwood appeared.

Leslie Grey was about to rebuke the girl for her remarks to the cook, but Robt interrupted him.

"Well, how does the bridegroom feel?" he asked cheerily.

"Shut up!"

"What's the matter? Cranky on your wedding mutton?" pursued the town clerk irrepressibly.

"I wish to goodness you'd keep your mouth shut. Why don't you go and proclaim my affairs from the steps of your hulking Town Hall?" Grey glanced meaningfully in the direction of the woman standing in open-mouthed astonishment beside one of the tables.

Robb laughed and his eyes twinkled mischievously. He turned sharply on the girl.

"Why, didn't you know that Mr. Grey was going to be married to day?" he asked, with assumed solemnity. "Well, I'm blessed," as the girl shook her head and giggled. "You neglect your duty, Nellie, my girl. What are you here for but to 'stir up haah' and learn all the gossip and scandal concerning the boarders? Yes, Mr. Grey is going to get married to day, and I am to be his best man. Now be off, and fetch my 'mutton'—which is pork."

The girl ran off to do as she was bid, and also to convey the news to her friends in the kitchen. Robb sat down beside his companion and chattered softly as he gazed at Grey's ill-humoured face, and listened to the shrills of laughter which were borne on the atmosphere of cooking from behind the baze door.

Grey clutched down in indignation. For once he understood that protest would not serve him. Everything

about his marriage had been kept quiet in Ainsley up till now, not because there was any need for it, but because he had acceded to his expressed wishes. The latter, however, felt himself in no way bound to keep a silence on this, the eventful day. Robb attacked some toast as a peremptory, while the other devoured his steak. Then Grey looked up from his plate. The face had cleared; his ill humour had been relieved by a look of keen earnestness.

"It's a beastly nuisance that this is my wedding day," he began. "Yes, I mean it," as Robb looked up in honest astonishment. "I don't mean anything derogatory to anybody. I just state an obvious fact. You would understand if you knew all."

"But, damn it, man, you ought to be ashamed of yourself for saying such a thing. You are marrying one of the best and sweetest girls in Southern Manitoba, and yet why, it's enough to choke a man off his feed." Chillingwood was angry.

"Don't be a fool. You haven't many brains, I know, but use the few you possess now, and listen to me. A week ago, yes, a week hence, yes. But for the next three days I have some dangerous work on hand that must be done. Work of my department."

"Ah, dirty work, I suppose, or there'd be no 'must' or 'danger' about it."

Grey shrugged.

"Call it what you like. Since you've left the service I suppose you look at things differently," he said. "Any way, it's good enough for me to be determined to see it through in spite of my wedding. Damn it, there's always some obstacle or other stepping up at important moments in my life. However, I wish I knew whether I could still trust you to do something for me. It would only fly matters considerably."

Robb looked serious. He might not be possessed of many brains, as Grey had suggested with glee, Grey's opinion were generally warped. But he thought well before he replied. And when he spoke he showed considerable decision and foresight.

"You can trust me all right enough if the matter is clean and honest. I'll do nothing dirty for you or anybody else. I've seen too much."

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"Oh, it's clean enough. I don't dirty my hands with dishonest dealings. I simply do my duty."

"But your sense of duty is an exaggerated one, sir. I notice that it takes the form of any practices which you consider will advance your personal interests."

"It so happens that my 'personal interests' are synonymous with the interests of those I serve. Not all this is at the delivery of a letter in Winnipeg, at a certain time on a given date. I can't trust the post for a very particular reason, so I add to the telegraph, that wouldn't answer my purpose. I could employ a messenger, but that would not do, for a disinterested messenger could be got up. You, like me, couldn't be so influenced if you saw me, then I insist on it myself, which means that I must leave my bride alone after the ceremony to-day, and not return to her on Friday, more than two days hence. That's how the matter stands. I will pay all your expenses and give you a substantial present to boot. Just for delivering a letter to the chief of police in Winnipeg. I will go and write it at once if you consent."

Robb shook his head doubtfully.

"I must know more than that. First, I must know, in confidence of course, the object of that letter. And, secondly, who is to be the victim of your machinations. Without these particulars you can count me 'out.' I'll be no party to anything I might afterwards have cause to regret."

"That settles it then," replied Grey resentfully. "I can't reveal the name of my 'victim' as you so graciously put it. You happen to know him. I believe he dare not a friendly meeting with him." He finished up with a callous laugh.

Robb's eyes shone wickedly.

"By Jove, Grey, you've ask pretty low in your efforts to regain your lost position. I always knew that you hadn't a particle of feeling in your whole body for any one but yourself, but I didn't think you'd treat me to a taste of your rotten ways. Were it not for the sake of Alice Grey, I'd turn the girl you are going to marry, I wouldn't be your best man. You have become a really impudent, and, after to-day's event, I wash my hands of you. Damn it, you're a skunk!"

Grey laughed loudly, but there was no mirth in his hilarity. It was a heartless, cynical laugh.

"Easy, Robb, don't get on your high horse," he said presently. Then he became silent and a sigh escaped him. "I had to make the suggestion," he went on after a while. "You are the only man I dared to trust. Confound it if you must have it, I'm sorry!" The speech came out with a jerk, it seemed to have been uttered wrong from him. "Try and forget it, Robb," he went on, more quietly, "we've known each other for so many years."

Robb was slightly mollished, but he was not likely to forget his companion's proposition. He changed the subject.

"Talking of Winnipeg, you know I was up there on business the other day. I had a bit of a shock while I was walking about the dépôt waiting for the train to start."

"Oh," Grey was not paying much attention, he was absorbed in his own thoughts.

"Yes," Robb went on. "You remember Mr. Zachary Smith?"

His companion looked up with a violent start.

"Well, I guess. What of him? I'm not likely to forget him easily. There is just one desire I have in life which dwarfs all others to insignificance, and that is to stand face to face with Mr. Zachary Smith. Grey finished up significantly.

"Ah! So I should suppose," Robb went on. "Those are my feelings to a certainty. But I didn't quite realize my desire, and, besides, I wasn't sure, anyhow. A man appeared just for one moment, at the booking-office door as I happened to pass it. He stopped a moment, and I caught his eye. Then he beat a retreat before I had called his face to mind—you see, his appearance was quite changed. A moment later I remembered him, or thought I did, and gave chase. But I had lost him, couldn't discover a trace of him, and nearly lost the train into the bargain. Mind I am not positive of the fellow's identity, but I'd guarantee a few dollars on the matter, anyway."

"Lord! I'd have missed fifty trains rather than have lost sight of him. Just our luck," Grey exclaimed violently.

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"Well, if he's in the district, we'll come across him again. Perhaps you will have the next chance." Robb pushed his chair back.

"I hope so."

"It was the right enough" Robb went on meditatively his cherry face puckered into an expression of perplexity. "He was well dressed, too, in the garb of an ordinary cutter and looked quite clean and respectable. His face had faded out, but it was his eyes that fixed me. You remember those two great, deep-setken, cow-eyes of his?" Robb broke off as he saw Grey start. "Why what's up?"

Grey shook himself, then he gazed straight before him. Nor did he heed his companion's question. A strongly-marked furrow appeared between his eyebrows, and a look of uncertainty was on his face. Robt again urged him.

"You haven't seen him?" he asked.

"I don't know," replied Grey.

"What do you mean?"

"I have just remembered something. I came across a stranger the other day. He was wrapped in furs, and I could only see his eyes. But those eyes were distinctly familiar 'cow'-eyes, I think you said. I was struck with their appearance at the time, but couldn't just realize where I had seen eyes like 'em before." Then he went on reflectively. "But no, it couldn't have been he. Ah—" He broke off and glanced in the direction of the window as the jangle of sleigh bells sounded outside. "Here's our cutter. Come on."

Robb rose from his seat and brushed the crumbs from off his trousers. There came the sound of voices from the other side of the door.

"Some of the boys," said Robb, with a meaning smile. "It's early for 'em."

"I believe this is your doing," said Grey sulkily.

Robb nodded in the direction of the window.

"You've got a team. This is no 'one-horsed' affair."

The door opened suddenly and two men entered.

"Oh, here he is," said one, Charlie Trellis, the postmaster, with a laugh. "Congratulate you, Grey, my friend. Double harness, eh? Tame you down, my boy. Good thing, marriage— for taming a man."

" You're not looking your best," said the other, Jack Broad, the telegraph operator. " Why, man, you look as tho' you were going to your own funeral. Back up! Come and have a 'f' lins', brace you up for the ordeal."

" Go to the devil, both of you," said Grey ungraciously. " I don't swill eye-openers all day like you, Jack Broad. Got something else to do."

" So it seems. But cheer up, man," replied Broad imperturbably, " it's not as bad as having a tooth drawn."

" Not half as unpleasant as a funeral," put in Trellis with a grin.

Grey turned to Robb.

" Come on," he said abruptly. " Let's get. I shall see things in a minute if I stay here."

" That 'ud be something new for you," called out Broad as the two men left the room.

The door closed on his remark and he turned to his companion.

" I'm sorry for the poor girl," he went on. " The most cantankerous pig I ever ran up against—is Grey."

" Yes," agreed the other. " I can't think how a decent fellow like Robb Chillingwood can chum up with him. He's a surly clown—only fit for such countries as the Yukon, where he comes from. He's not particularly clever either. Yes," turning to the waitress, " the usual. How would you like to be the bride?"

The girl shook her head.

" No, thanks. I like candy."

" Ah, not vinegar."

" Nor—nor—pigs."

Broad turned to the grey-headed postmaster with a loud guffaw.

" She seems to have sized Grey up pretty slick."

Outside in the hall the two men donned their furs and over-shoes. Fortunately for Grey's peace of mind there was no one else about. The bar-tender was sweeping the office out, but he did not pause in his work. Outside the front door the livery-stable man was holding the horses. Grey took his seat to drive, and wrapped the robes well about him. It was a bitterly cold morning. Robb was

just about to climb in beside him when a ginger-headed man clad in a pea-jacket came running from the direction of the Town Hall. He waved one arm vigorously, clutching in his hand a piece of paper. Robb saw him first.

"Something for me, as sure as a gun. Hold on, Grey," he said. "It's Sutton, the sheriff. I wonder what's up?"

The ginger-headed man came up breathlessly.

"Thought I was going to miss you, Cl. Longwood. A message from the Mayor. Do it as soon as you can that the United States marshal has got that horse-thief, La Mar, over the other side. You'll have to make out the papers for bringing him over. I've got to go and fetch him at once."

"But, hang it man, I can't do them now," exclaimed Robb.

"He's on leave of absence," put in Grey.

"Can't be helped. I'm sorry," said the sheriff. "It's business, you know. Besides, it won't take you more than an hour. I must get across to Verdon before noon or it'll be too late to get the papers 'backed' there. Come on, man, you can get another cutter and follow Grey up in an hour. You won't lose much time."

"Yes, and who's going to pay the passage?" said Robb, relinquishing his hold on the cutter's rul.

The sheriff shrugged his shoulders.

"You'll have to stay," he said conclusively.

"I suppose so. Grey, I'm sorry."

"Oh, it doesn't matter," replied Grey coldly. "It's not your fault. Well, good-bye. Don't bother to follow me up."

"Damnit!" ejaculated the good-hearted Robb, as the cutter moved away.

"Going to get married, am't he?" said the sheriff shortly, as Grey departed.

"Yes." And the two men walked off in the direction of Clullingwood's office.

And Grey drove off to his wedding alone. He was denied even the support of the only man who, out of sheer good-heartedness, would have accompanied him. The life of a man is more surely influenced by the peculiarities of his own disposition than anything else. When a man

takes to him; if a wife, it is not truly a time for the well-wishes of his friends. This man set out alone. Not one good speed went with him. And yet he was not disturbed by the lack of company. He looked at life from an un-common standpoint, in as far as it's possible for the attainment of happiness by his way. Society for him is not by any means a social luxury. He is aware of the few men who need no friendship from his. These prefer it rather to be with out it. That he is married he was forced to follow his own methods of life. His situation was his only position in the world. If life be hard chosen. And if he can't attain this solely by his own exertions, then he would do without it.

The crisp, morning air. The horsewhisks with the snap of a whip lash as he forced his way through the snow-laden trees in the Hudson's House to the cross-ways. It was necessary for him to cross the track at this point before he would find him the junction of the principal road to the Leonville school house at which place the ceremony was to be performed. The "gash" of the horses' hoofs sounded refreshingly in his ears as the animals fairly dashed over the smooth icy trail. The shrill bell jingled with a confused clatter. A sound in response to the call of the eager beasts. But Gere thought little of these things. He thought little of anything just now but his intended dropping of the owner of Lively Ranch. All other matters were quite secondary to his one chief object.

Once out in the open, the horses settled down into their long-distance stride. Here the trail was not so good as in the precincts of the village. The snow was deeper and softer. Now and then the horses' hoofs would break through the frozen crust and sink well above the fetlocks into the under-snow.

Now the thick bush, which surrounded the village, gave place to a sparser covering of scattred bluffs, and the grey white aspect of the earth became apparent. The trail was well marked as far as the eye could reach, two great furrows ploughed by the passage of horses and the runners of the farmers' heavy "double bobs." Besides this, the colour was different. There was a strong suggestion of earthiness about the trail which was not to be

observed upon the rolling snow fields of the surrounding hills.

The air was still throughout, and the morning sun had already risen high above the mist of grey clouds which still hovered about the eastern horizon. There was a tingling coldness over all. It was the morning promise of a fair day, and soon the dazzling sunlight upon the snow would become blinding to eyes unused to the winter sun.

But Grey was no tenderfoot. Such things had no terror for him. His hard, bloodless eyes faced the glare of light defiantly. It is only the inexperienced who gaze upon the snow bound earth, at such a time, with wide-open eyes.

The trail became a series of mile after mile of unbroken, the long, rolling strides of the hardy horses. Occasionaly Grey would stop them off the trail into the deep snow to allow the heavy load, not lack of a team, to pass. The horses drugged with the mass of grain, toiling with way to the snow covered elevator. These conveniences were the rule of the road, the lighter always giving way to the heavier conveyances.

The day was long. A grey and the wide open sea of snow melted and the sun melted the form. Not a tree in sight, not a rock to indicate land the east or west. Just one, lone, gaunt, spire of snow, ploughing beneath the burning sun, the snow covered earth. A big grey coyote had his trap, was going in search of food at a distance of fifteen miles to the right by reason of the inclusion. An occasional cry of prairie chicken, a silv' wing, their way to the north, but it might well be shooting in the high, snow covered hills. A dark ribbon like flight of ducks, a grey flock, pan the prairie, speedily from the south to the north, in the field where the setting prairie should be open, was something to distract the attention of eyes that were weary. But Grey was far from to every moment of the trail lost to him, the gut of his team and his scheme for advancement.

The sun went down, and the time passed rapidly to the traveller. And as the record of a stage road, the face of the world did not begin again to change its appearance. The undulations of the prairie assumed

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vector proportions. The water rose to the point of full flood, and the gentle boulders and stones were washed into gurgling streams. The air was filled with smoke and the sky of yellowish-brown dotted by smoke. A few hours later, with the smoke largely at the rear, a long, dark cloud stretching in rectangular directions, long and low, like the barking of dogs, like these clouds of haze taken suddenly and bizarre now have become even more rare. The fire increased and spread the bush thick. Now and the traveller is on his way down country intersected by ice-bound streets and snow-laden buildings. The timber becomes more heavy, great pine trees dominating the more sheltered ground, and dominating the track by reason of their more permanent vegetation. On the eastern extremity of this belt of country stood the school house of Lanesville. beyond that the undulating prairie again on Lower Dixie Creek.

Lane's face looked at his watch. The hands indicated a time approaching to the hour of one. He had yet three hours to go to reach his destination. He had crossed a small creek. A colt had bridged it, but the snow upon either side of the trail was a deep drift. The hollow that the induction of the woodwork was visible. It was in such places as these that a watchful mare and her foal, at the moment of divergence from the beaten track, would have penetrated the brush and either taken a path in which it would have been impossible to follow, or had stampeded up. Once safely across the hollow he would have to climb the opposite bank of the creek. He did so well, he had crossed the drifts, and the hollows, the snows.

The horse was a man of red and orange colors. It was not though the gradual darkening of the light of the sun over country had culminated upon the horse. The orange glow of the pine spires had its effect well on the snow and gazing now, at the yellow horse, there was an impression of a weird of lightness in the scene. The horse pranced and was suddenly stopped. The darkness of the pine trees, long before it, had covered something of its movement that had to their great terror. Fired, he might be, but he was truly to day at each rustle of the heavy brushwood, as some day

breath. Four bent them basely and forced from them a  
reaking protest.

As the train descended the summit the trail narrowed  
down to a band of track laid from the conveyance  
almost have brushed the tree-trunks.

Leslie Grey's heart was heavy and his thoughts were  
heavy. These had dispelled the openings in the trees  
at the summit. He drove the hill against the shrine. He  
had driven it, and he turned on his way to Lorn  
and Lorn knew it not for it. It had no beauties  
to him. These pools of weeds conveyed a thing to his  
mind, possibly he had not even dreamt, for fear was  
more for ignominy than the. This feeling of security was  
more the result of his own lofty opinion of himself and the  
strength to which he believed his breakers, rather than  
a high morn for he was scared. Whatever his fear is  
not was a pool which found no place in his vocabulary.  
A voice of awe — a voice in might have injured weak  
men. From the pool which he found himself sur-  
rounded by his people. But Leslie Grey was differently  
disposed.

Now as he neared the summit of the hill, he leant  
slightly forward, holding the reins of the one which he had  
failed to be slung upon his horse's back. A resounding  
chime — and the weary beasts strained at their necks.

The noiseless rustling in amongst the trees attracted  
their attention. The rustling noisily were suddenly  
thrown up an startled attention. The off-side horse  
jumped sideways against the companion, and the sleigh  
was within an ear of finding the tree. By a great effort  
they pulled the single horse to the trail and his whip fell  
heavily across their backs. Then he looked up to discover  
the cause of the fright. A tall figure, a man clad in a  
black sheepskin coat, stood like a statue between two

—  
His right arm was raised and his hand gripped a levelled  
steel. But the confessor Grey surveyed the appear-  
ance of the son with a look of respect. Then a sharp  
word was out, and passing the gun's lance, and his  
hands were joined which stood his eyes closed.

The next moment the eyes did it almost unseeing  
opened again, he swayed forward as though in great pain.

then with an effort he flung himself backwards, settling himself against the unyielding back of the seat. His face looked drawn and grey, nor did he attempt to renew the reins which had dropped from his hands. The horses unrestrained, broke into a bounding gallop, and drove them on and they raced down the track, keeping to the beaten track with their wild instinct, even although mad with fear. A moment later and the hounds appeared over the brow of the hill.

All became silent again, except for the confused clatter of the sleigh-bells on the horses' heads. The tall figure moved out on to the trail, and stood gazing after the sleigh. For a full minute he stood thus. Then he turned again and swiftly became lost in the black depths whence he had so mysteriously appeared.

## CHAPTER VIII

### GREY'S LAST WORDS

Broom Hill stands in the Leominstershire. The house is a large, square, two-story building, built of stone. It stands quite alone, as though in proud distinction for its desolate location. Its flat, uninteresting roof is topped by a single, square window, its hipped roof of wood. The exterior is weather-boarding, recent of paint, and almost of perfect, these things to be one for a day, a flat roof of slate, a carefully-trimmed handiwork.

Inside, its spacious roof was for the moment suspended by a rent, than could be made of many pieces, between labour and form, for both the number and variety of figures, stood grouped about the two fireplaces, which looked out by the rear, the one in front of it. This was a level of smooth prairie, footed one side of the hill, whilst at the back of the house stretched miles of broken, hilly woodland.

The wedding party had arrived from Loon Dyke Farm. Elizabeth Melling had gathered her friends together, and all had driven over for the happy event, and the wildest enthusiasm and excited anticipation. Each girl, clad in her brightest colours beneath a sober outer covering of fur, was accompanied by her attendant swain, the latter well ridged about the hair and well bronzed about the face, a glowing as usual effect of the liberal use of soap and water. A wedding was no common occurrence, and, in consequence, demanded special marks of appreciation. No work would be done that day by any of those who attended the function.

But the enthusiasm of the mother had died out at the first breath of news. The full, ringing rest by the non-appearance of the bridegroom. The hour of the ceremony

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was close at hand and still he had not arrived. He should have been the first upon the scene. The others were scattered, the younger folk hopeless and full of execration. I waited grimly, the most silent person in the place, a peerless ~~person~~. He had driven over from the east at much inconvenience to himself to celebrate at the launching of his old friend's daughter upon the boughs of wedded life.

The older ladies had rallied to Mrs. Malling's side. The younger people had alighted. There was no more talking and no more whispering and everyone was looking hopefully upon the grey trail which stretched winding away towards the western horizon.

The Rev. Charles Danvers, the Methodist minister of Lakeside, was the central figure of the situation, and it was the elder ladies from their communion who had gestured. There could be no doubt from the uniform tone of these remarks that a parson was approaching.

"It's quite too bad you know, and Mrs. Danvers is a won grey-haired lady of decided presence and a hooked nose. "I can't understand this man, I M. Grey a business like ways. Now here, at the sort of time when I should have expected would have been here at least an hour before it was necessary.

"It is just his sort that fail on these occasions," purred Mrs. Ganthorn passionately. "He's just too full of his nose for my fancy. What is the time now, Mr. Danvers?"

"On the stroke of the half hour," replied the parson with a gloomy look. "My eyeglass isn't very good, so I can't see anything on the trail, or is that black object a bush?"

"Bush," said some one shortly.

"Ah!" ejaculated the parson. Then he turned to Mrs. Malling, who stood beside him staring down the trail with unblinking eyes. Her lips were pursed and her tongue nervous. "There can have been no mistake about the time, I suppose?"

"Mistake? No," retorted the good lady with irritation. "Folks don't make a mistake about the hour of their wedding. Not the bridegroom, anyway. No, he can't be late. That's what it is, as sure as my name's Hulda Deborah Malling. And that's what comes of his staying at

to his when he ought to have been benevolent. To think of a man driving forty odd miles to get married. I was sick. It just makes me mad with him. There's enough to be mad about every here and there out on her wedding day, and now I have to her mother. It's a shame, and I'm not the one to be likely to forget to tell him so when he comes along. If he were my man he'd better his ways, I know."

No one replied to the old lady's heated complaint. They all took cordially agreed with her to defend the local boy, though. Mr. Deavers drew out his watch for at least the twentieth time.

"Five minutes, verda," he moaned. Then aloud to his daughter. "We must allow him some margin to live. I say it certainly was a mistake his remaining at Alanson."

Mr. Deavers was indeed. Mrs. Mallings reported that as the worth she was capable of. "He is that fool henceforth he won't listen to reason. What couldn't he have a pig at the farm? Proprietary-fol' jesticks!" Her face was flushed and her brow ominously pucker'd she clutched her fat hands with no uncertain grip across the sofa. Deaf to him, in which answered her jibes for a instant. Here she was chiefly based upon alarm, and that alarm was not alone for her daughter. She was anxious for the man himself, and her anxiety found vent in that peculiar angry protest which is so little meant by those who resort to it. The good dame was no pins and needles of nervous suspense. Had Grey suddenly appeared upon the scene do you see her kindly face would have at once wreathed itself into a broad expansion of smiles. But the moments flew by and still the little group waited for the coming which was so long delayed.

Three of the young men approached the agitated mother from the juvenile gathering. Their faces were solemn. Their own of course. It had given way before the protracted roar. Tim Lincoln and Peter Butters came first, Andy, the choreman, brought up the rear.

"We've been thinking," said Tim, feeling it necessary to explain the process which had brought them to a certain conclusion, "that maybe we might just drive down the trail to see if we can see anything of him, Mrs. Mallings.

"Ye can't just say how things have gone with him. May be he's struck a 'dumb' - as has rightly got to be had. There's some 't' is drifts to come through, and it's dear easy to get dumped in 'em. Peter and Andy here has volunteered to go with me."

"That's real's sister of you, Tim," replied Mrs. Malling with an air of relief. She felt quite convinced that an accident had happened. She could see the nun star. In this matter she considered he was the best judge. Like many of her acquaintances she looked to the minister as her best worldly as well as spiritual adviser of her flock. "Lik as not the boys will be able to help him?" she suggested in a tone of inquiry.

"I don't think I should let them go yet," the master of the cloisters said. "I'll give them an hour. It seems to me it will be time enough. Ah, here's Mrs. Gurnidge," as that lady appeared in the doorway. "There's no sign of him," he called out in answer to one of her inquiry. "I hope you are not letting the bride worry too much."

"It's awfully dreadful," said Mrs. Gurnidge, as her thoughts reverted to Prudence waiting in the school matron's sitting-room.

"Whatever can have happened to him?"

"That's what I been trying to get us to believe and more," snapped the girl's mother. She was in no humor to be asked silly questions, however little they were intended to be answered.

She turned to Sarah. In this trouble the peaceful Sarah would act as oil on troubled waters.

Sarah understood her look of inquiry.

"She's bearing up bravely, Hepzibah. She's not one of the crying sort. Too much of your silica in her for that. I've done my best to console her."

She did not say that she had propounded several mottos more or less suitable to the occasion which had been delivered with greatunction to the disconsolate girl. Prudence had certainly benefited by the good woman's company, but not in the way Sarah had hoped and believed. It was the girl's own sense of humour which had helped her.

Mrs. Malling turned away abruptly. Her red face had

grown a shade paler and her round, brown eyes were suspiciously wet. But she gazed steadily down the trail on which all her hopes were set. He gave a strand around in view of his absence. The party which had been so wretchedly held had now become as silent as though they had come to attend a funeral. The minister continued to glaze at his watch from time to time. He had probably never in his life so frequently referred to that faithful companion of his preaching hours, Tom Gile, he said Peter Furrer and Andy had moved off in the direction of the sleds. The others followed Mrs. Malling's example and beat their eyes upon the vanishing point of the trail.

And truly an ejaculation escaped one of the bystanders. Some long-roaring had just come into view. All eyes concentrated upon a black speck which was advancing rapidly in the clear ground snow. Hope rose at a bound. Could, eager delight. The object was a sled. And the speed at which it was running down the trail told them that it was bearing the bearded bridegroom who, conscious of his fault, was endeavouring to make up the lost time. Mrs. Malling's round face shone again in her relief and a sigh of content escaped her. There was sent at once to the bride and all was enthusiasm again. Then followed a terrific shock. Peter Furrer more long-lasted than the rest, uttered it in a boorish fashion as his own.

"There isn't no one aboard of that sled," he called out. "Say, them people is just below. Gosh, but they be comin' hell-ho! fer-lookabun!" Every one understood his expression and faced that a moment before had been radiant with hope changed their expression with equal suddenness to doubt, then in a moment to apprehension.

"You don't say—" Mrs. Malling gasped; it was all she could say.

"It is—" The minister got no further, and he fingered his watch in force of habit.

"It is—" some one said and broke off. Then followed an excited murmur. "What a Peter going to do?"

The young giant had started off down the trail in the direction of the approaching sled. He lurched heavily over the snow, his ungainly body rolling to his gait, but

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he was covering ground in much the same way that a man gallops at night. His stride was of bounding, at a great pace. The onlookers wondered and examined the gaze, after it glared unmercifully between the two of us, to the uttering of a shrill and the huge barking figure of the boy.

Now the sleigh was near enough for them to note the truth of Peter's statement. The horses, unguided by any guiding hand, were tearing along at a desperate pace. The cutter stepped a few paces on a threatening line, but now it was lifted bodily from the trail as the mares struck the backened mire of the frozen way, now it was a mad race.

In barking better, now the mares and fighting itself now on the other, the mares were madly galloping forward with a shrill to the heels of the affrighted horses, with a startling effect. The poor brutes stretched themselves with terror from their terrors. On they were sent at a white of flying snow, and Peter had halted beside the track awaiting them.

For who would gaze the boy never outside the eastern trees. He was the terror of the woods, always could be heard by those who gazed. If the animals were not stayed in their mad career, they must necessarily smash into the school house or dash with the mares at the tying posts. There was no chance of their leaving the beaten trail, for they were panic horses.

Some of the men, as the realization of this fact dawned upon them, tried away to remove their ponies as to some more secure position, but most of them remained gaping at the runaway team.

Now they saw Peter rush down, leaping the snow under his feet to give himself a firm立足. Barely fifty yards separated him from the sleigh. He settled himself into an attitude as though about to spring. Never drew the sleigh. The boy's position was fraught with the greatest danger. The onlookers held their breath. What did he contemplate? Peter had methods peculiar to him, and those who looked wondered. Never, never came the horses. A moment more and the boy was lost in the cloud of snow which rose beneath the horses' speeding feet. A sigh broke from many of the ladies as they saw him disappear. Then, next, there came

an exclamation of relief as they saw his bulk figure at the gloaming to draw himself over the high bank of the stream. It was in vain to call out Peter's great strength would have. They saw him with a groan and a start upon his cushion, then for a moment, he looked down as though in doubt.

At last he leaped forward and taking hold of the end of the unbroken dash, he bounded noiselessly out of the setting of the night. In a few moments he had his hand upon the rock that was causing an ugly bend in his track. He ventured not further, starting to the dashward which caused and bent under the increased weight. Suddenly he turned back and over the cushion they and the horse moved to the right. He came within an easy falling distance of the bank, but without his usual strength he was unable to leaping onto the surface of the water. With a struggle he recovered himself and swam to the shore. The rest was the work of a few moments.

Swimming himself he leaped from the bank to the single rock. The horse stood silent and waiting the dash was ploughed into the deep snow. The frantic animal fell over and over, and floundered on them with a great cry of agony and terror. Peter stood clear of the track, but with experience of such cases, he clung tenaciously to the rock. He was dragged a few yards then, the riding and ready to start off again at a moment's notice, the jaded beasts stood.

There was a rush of men to Peter's assistance. The horses followed. But the latter never reached the side of the stream. Something clad in the brown fur of the buffalo was lying beside the track where the rider had overtaken. Here they came to a stand and found themselves gazing down upon the inanimate form of Leslie Grey.

It was a number of the younger ladies of the party who reached the injured man first. The older girls and one of the Miss Grey's. They passed silently within a couple of yards of the prostrate object and stared forward, gazing down at it with half closed eyes. The next minute they were thrust aside by the persons. Helen followed by Mrs. Malling.

It was evident he had thrown himself upon his knees and was looking into the pale face of the prostrate man and almost unconsciously his hand pushed itself in through

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the fastenings of the fur coat. He withdrew it almost instantly, giving vent to a sharp exclamation. It was covered with blood.

"Stand back, please, everybody," he commanded.

He was obeyed implicitly. But his order came too late. They had seen the blood upon his hand.

Miss Ganthorn began to faint and was led away. Other girls looked as though they might follow suit. Only Hepzibah Malling stood her ground. Her face was blanched, but her mouth was tightly closed. She uttered no sound. All her anger against the prostrate man had vanished, a world of pity was in her eyes as she silently looked on.

The parson summoned some of the men.

"Bear a hand, boys," he said in a business-like tone which deserved no one. "We're getting him in to the house." Then, seeing Mrs. Malling by a window, "Get Prudence away at once. She must not see."

The old farm wife hurried off and the others gently raised the body of the unconscious man and bore it towards the house.

It did Louis Grey attend his bidding.

The body was taken in by a back way to Sarah Curridge's bedroom and laid upon the bed. Tom Gresham was despatched at once to Lakeville for the doctor. This distressing everybody but Harry Gresham. Mr. Haven proceeded to remove the sick man's outer clothing.

The room was small, the one window infinitely so. A single sunbeam shone coldly in through the lattice and lit up the well scrubbed bare floor. There was nothing but the plainer of "furnishings" in the apartment, but they had been set in position by the deft hand of a woman of taste. The bed on which the unconscious man had been placed was narrow and hard. Its coverlet was a pale blue affair of depressing hue.

Mr. Haven bent to his work with a full appreciation of the tragedy which had happened. His face was solemn, and expressive of the most tender solicitude for the injured man. In a whisper he despatched his assistant for warm water and bandages, whilst he unfastened and removed the fur coat. Inside the clothing was saturated with still warm blood. The minister's lips tightened as

the truth of what had happened slowly forced itself upon his mind.

A great load was on his mind, the load that he had taken of the secret of the girl's whisperings which came to him from the past. It was not from the realising of the secret that warned him that the door was open, that he saw it open from his own vision. At that moment there was a sharp, sudden, short-drawn breath from across the bare floor, and the girl was at the opposite end of the bed.

The soft round of the girl's face was drawn, and deep lines of anxiety, then, he had broken up the smooth repose of her countenance. Her eyes seemed to be straining out of their sockets, and the whites were exposed. She did not speak, but her look displayed an anguish unexampled. Her eyes were turned upon the face of the prostrate man, she did not appear to see the minister. Her look suggested some mute question, which seemed to pass from her troubled eyes to the silent figure. Watched her, however, understood that for the present it would be dangerous to break the dreadfully tense quiet that held her. He struggled again and drew back the mantua and began to unbutton the outer garments from Grey's chest.

Softly as the minister's deft fingers moved about the man's body, his thoughts travelled farther. He was not a man given to mental contumaciousness. He could hardly conceive of the actual existence of human misery. He was there to find the man really sick as well as spirally. But at the moment he felt positively sick in the stomach with sorrow and pity for the woman who stood like a statue on the other side of what he knew to be this man's deathbed. He dared not look over at her again. Instead, he drew his head lower and concentrated his mind on the work before him.

The scene continued, broken only by an occasional heavy gasp of breath from the girl. The draping sheet was pulled from the man's chest and the wooden under sheet was then drawn over him. The exposed flesh was pale, and the skin which was so white owing from a steady perspiration was his brother's in the chest than where the heart was no longer beating. One glance sufficed to tell the person that minister had would be unmoved. The world was through the lungs.

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For a moment he hesitated. His better sense warned him to keep silence but pity urged him to speak. Pity swayed him with the stronger hand.

"He is alive," he said. "But the next moment he regretted his words.

The tension of the girl's delicate system relaxed instantly. It was as the string of a bad weight which had crushed her heart with dolor. She had been number paralysed. Actual suffocation had not even here she had escape caused a cessation of feeling which had gone from the shock. But that a spasm was far more dreadful than the most violent suffocation. It overwhelmed her senses. What is it? and the longing for the master had been to her in the nature of a blank.

The minister's long and silent silence had supplied her with an answer. He was dead. The words to her the springs of life within her and a glad flush swept over her stricken person. Reason, more and more, swayed its way and the light flew through her brain in an unchecked torrent. It seemed to her that a thin, fine barrier had suddenly shot up the simple life which had always been hers, and had opened out for her a fresh existence in which she found herself alone with the still broken body of her lover. For one brief instant her lips quivered, and a faint instant long of the breath told of the man which, at the first return of feeling had leapt upon her. It is before the maturity of man to bring about the breakdown, a calm strength saving her aid and steadied her nerves and checked the tears which had so suddenly burst into her eyes. Women are like this. At a crisis in sickness they are superior to all masters. When the crisis is past, whether for good or ill, it is different.

The water was brought, and the minister set about tearing the devoluted flesh while the dame looked on in silence. She was very pale, and her eyes were painfully bright. While her gaze followed the gentle movements of the minister, her thoughts were racing swiftly over the scenes of her life in which the old man had played his part. She never noted every look of the now clouded eyes, and every expression of his well loved features. She called to mind his words of hope

and the care of his bad plans for his advancement. Nor was there any secret of his secret base in her regard, and then there were no explanations to her, except and truly. She loved him with all the passionate intensity of one who had only just attained to perfect womanhood. He had given her something of a hero, by reason of his headstrong and daring ways, ways which more often attracted the love of woman to the first flush of her youth than in her mature, more experienced years.

The girl's eyes cleared the depth of the ghastly stain and the small wound with its tickered rim lay revealed in all its horrid significance. The girl's eyes fixed themselves on it, and for some seconds she watched the blood as it welled up to the surface. The meaning of the puncture seared itself slowly upon her mind, and she realized that it was no accident which had led her lover low. Her eyes remained directed towards the crimson flow, but their expression had changed, as also the set of her features. A hard, iron-like look had replaced the one of tender pity—a look which indeed a feeling more strong than any other in the human organism. She was beginning to understand now that a crime had been committed, and a very foul hate for the person unknown possessed her.

She pointed at the wound, and her voice sounded only in the stillness of the room.

"That," she said, "They have murdered him."

"He has been hit." The man looked up into the girl's eyes.

The tall westerner, Sarah Grindge and Prudence's mother, stood with her and approached the bedside. The tall, slender girl, a member of Grindge in her blood and name to Mr. Grindge, Mrs. Grindge, urged herself beside her daughter at the head of the bed.

The farm-wife lifted the girl to the bed-post and caressed her, showing sympathy. Then she endeavored to draw her away.

"Come on, I'll rescue them. You can do no good here."

Prudence shook her off roughly. So did she answer. Her mother did not renew her attempt.

All watched while Grindge freed some of the spirit between Grey's tightly closed lips and then stood up to note the effect.

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He was actuated by a single thought. He knew that the man was destined, but he hoped that somehow, this night, or next, before the time came, he might be sent out. There was something to be said of human life, and gave the dying man a chance to say it. Prudence seemed to be in awe of the master's mother. For she very reluctantly nodded her approval as she saw the spirit administered.

All waited eagerly for the sign of life which the attenuating properties of the salve might reveal. The girl closed her thin gloves to drift away to the long, dark trail over which her lover had passed. She saw in fancy the crackling wood-sticks flying from the cover of a low, rocky cliff. She seemed to hear him easily to see the speeding horses, to hear the dismal sound of the fatal bullet as her man was hit. She pictured to herself the cessation, with callous indifference, as the rider passed out of view, mounting their horses and riding away. Her thoughts had turned to the only criminals she understood—horses.

The sign of life which had been so anxiously awaited came at last. It was apparent in the flaccid lips of the wan, life-exhausted in the faintest of sighs from between the colourless lips. Danvers bent again over the dying man and almost stirred more of the spirit. It took almost instantaneous effect. The eyelids half opened and the mouth distinctly moved. The action was like that of one who is parched with thirst. Her fingers passed painfully and a strange rattle came from his throat.

Danvers shook his head as he heard the sound. Prudence, who never had never left the big man's face, spoke sharply. She voiced a common thought.

"Who did it, Leslie?"

The master yielded approval. For a moment his eyes rested again on the girl's eager face. His glance astonished her. Then as he read her expression, bright his wonder lessened. The girl had bridged by a single step the gulf of transition from the girl to the woman. He understood that she had crossed that gulf.

She struggled to speak but only a hoarse, low-uttering, inarticulate sound. The master dragged. The response was briefful. This all realized that he was fast sinking, but in every heart was a hope that he would speak.

would say one word which might give some clue to what had happened.

The man lay silent for the rest of the day. The dying man's eyes were closed. The eyes opened wider. Prudence laid her hand on his. Her white, cold hand was in the look she bestowed upon the poor drawn face, and in the tones of her voice.

"Leslie, I never speak to me. My poor, poor boy. Tell me, how did it happen? Who did it?"

The man gasped in response. He seemed to be making one last great effort, despite the overwhelming weakness which was his. His head bowed and a feeble cough escaped his lips. The girl put her arm under his head and slightly raised it. And the dying eyes looked into hers. She could no longer find words to utter. Great passionate sobs also burst her. Her frank, wild words had been muffled down her cheeks as she fell upon the dying breast.

A whistling breath came from between the dying man's parted lips, and eddied out in a long rattling in the throat. His head slowly moved afterwards, and one arm lifted from the elbow upon the hard half turned towards the girl, and words distinct, but hoarse, came from the working lips.

"He—he did it. *Press*, *Press*. Tell now—  
now—" The last word died away to a gurgle. A violent fit of coughing seized the dying man, then it ceased suddenly. His head weighed like lead upon the girl's supporting hand, and a thin trickle of blood bubbled from the corners of his mouth. Prudence withdrew her arm from beneath him and replaced the head upon the pillow. Her tears had ceased to flow now.

"He is dead," she said with studied calmness, as she straightened herself up from the bed.

She moved a step or two away. Then she paused uncertainly and gazed about her like one dazed. Her mother went towards her, but before she reached her side Prudence uttered a strange wild cry and rushed from the room, tearing wildly at the fastenings of her silk dress as though to rid herself of the mocking reminder of that awful day.

## CHAPTER IX

### LONELY RANCH AT OWL HOOB

In spite of the recent tragic event, the routine of the daily life at Loun Dyke Farm was very little interfered with. Just for a few weeks following upon the death of Louise Grey the organization of Mrs. Mallory's household had been thrown out of gear.

The coming of the police and the general scouring of the country for the murderers of the Customs officer had entailed a "nine days' wonder" around the countryside, and had helped to disturb the wonted peace of the farm. But the search did not last long. Horse thieves do not wait long in a district, and the experience of the "riders of the plains" taught them that it would be useless to pursue where there was no clue to guide them. The search was abandoned after a while, and the dastardly murder remained an unsolved mystery.

The shock to Prudence's nervous system had been a terrible one, and a breakdown, closely bordering upon brain fever, had followed. The girl's condition had demanded the utmost care, and, in this matter, Sarah Gurnidge had proved herself a loyal friend. Dr. Parash, with conscientious soundness of judgment, had ordered her removal for a prolonged sojourn to city life in Toronto, a course which, in spite of heartbroken appeal on the girl's part, her mother insisted upon carrying out with Spartan-like resolution.

"Broken hearts," she had said to Sarah, during a confidential chat upon the subject, "are only kept from mending by them as talks sympathy. There isn't nothin' like mixin' with folks what's got their own troubles to worrit over. She'll get al' that for sure when she gets to one o' them cities. Cities is full of purgat'ry," she added profoundly. "I shall send her down to sister Emma, she's

ing to them hunting women that it never let the child rest a minute."

Aunt Sarah had appeared feelingly.

No time was safer than had eastwards for an indefinite period before the young opened. Mr. Hephaestus had yet to realize that his daughter had suddenly developed from a child who looked to her mother's guidance in all the more serious questions of life into a woman of strong feelings and opinions. The last casting off of the letters of childhood had been the last of those few passionate moments of the beside of her dying parent.

Rebecca had surrendered to the sentence which her mother backed by the mother's advice had passed and she went away. But it was long with the time she had to fume the outburst which had followed on her departure. The girl's heart almost beat to death, and she flatly refused to baptismal to herself with water. It came. She could not wait when she elected to do it, based on the purpose of the people, who very could claim her for long. And so she returned to the farm against all opposition within two months of leaving it.

The spring brought another change to the farm, a change which was as welcome to the old farm wife as the springing of the spring itself. Hervey set out from Niagara, bringing with him the stores of the larder of his mission. Trust to himself and the advice of Freckle, Mr. Hephaestus made his preparations, with the result that in the course of a week he accepted the stores and with his three-legged companion took up his abode at the farm.

And so the days in gathered and the summer heat increased, the heat in the sun, the sun reported and filled the air with its refreshing odours. The dark squares of ploughed land were quickly covered with the deepening carpet of green succulent grass, the wild currant bushes flowered, and the cherry blossoms ripened on the laden branches, and the deep blue vault of the heavens bowed down upon the verdant world.

George Freckle again became a constant and welcome visitor at the farm, one in her leisure did Sarah Grange seek relaxation in any other direction.

The morning was well advanced. The air was still and very hot. There was a peaceful dreamsomeness about the

large buildings and yard which was only broken by the occasional screech of the mounted swine rooting amongst say stray garbage these might have even happened to light upon. The upper half of the stable was stand open and in the cool shade of the exterior could be seen the outline of dark, well rounded forms loitering between the heel points of the stalls which lined the side walls. An occasional impotent stamp from the heavy shod hoofs, a told of the capacity for annoyance of the ubiquitous fly or aggravating mow, etc., abat the steady grunting sound which pervaded the stable here within, and the occasional "gush" of distended nostrils followed to healthy appetites, and noses buried in mangers well filled with sweet smelling "Timothy" hay.

The kitchen doorway was suddenly filled with the ample proportions of Mr. British Mr. — who moved out into the open. She was carrying a large pail filled with potato-peelings and other fragments of ordinary remains. A large white sunbonnet protected her grey head and shaded her now flaxen face from the sun, and her dress, a neat study in grey, was enveloped in a blue apron.

She moved out to a position well clear of the buildings and began to call out in a tone of peremptory encouragement —

"Tig-tig-tig! Tig-tig-tig!"

She repeated her summons several times, then moved on slowly, continuing to call at intervals.

The swine gathered with a low gruff rush at her heels, and their chorus of acclamations drawed her farther down the length of the barn she reached a cluster of thatched mud hovels. Here she opened the cross gate to admit her clamorous flock, and then deposited the contents of her pail in the trough provided for that purpose. The pigs fell to with the voracious avidity, soon ploughing voraciously the whole as oily pigs will.

She stood for a few moments looking down at her noisy charges with calculating eyes. It was a line muster of young porkers, and the old lady was estimating their future yielding capacity.

Suddenly her reflections were interrupted by the sound of footsteps, and turning she saw H. in a rushing the yard in the direction of the creamery. She saw him disappear

down the steps which led to the door, for the place was in the nature of a den of iniquity. She sighed heavily and moved away from her partner, and slowly she made her way to the wash room. The sight of this man had vanquished all her feelings of satisfaction. Her son was a constant trouble, but a source of grave worry and anxiety. Her hopes of him had been nothing but dimmed.

In the next room Harvey had propped himself against the doorway of the creamery and was talking to his sister without enthusiasm. The building, like all dugouts, was long and low, the roof was heavily thatched to protect the interior from the effects of the sun's rays. The fence was moving slowly along the two wide counter tops which lined the wall from one end to the other. Each counter was covered with a number of large milk pails from which the girl was carefully creaming the thick, rich cream. She worked methodically and the rich fat dripped with a heavy plink into the small pool she formed, in a manner which best fitted the quality of the cream.

She looked a little paler than usual. The healthy bloom had almost entirely disappeared from her cheeks and dark shadows surrounded her brown eyes. But this was the Harvey he had expected of the tragic which had come into her young life. The trim figure was unimpaired, and her usual look of perkiness was as carelessly adjusted as usual.

By one of the caprices of the tragic which had come into her young life, the trim figure was unimpaired, and her usual look of perkiness was as carelessly adjusted as usual. Harvey watched his sister's movements as she passed from pan to pan.

"I wish you would come over to Owl Hoot to day," he suddenly said. "We are going to have an afternoon's picnic, and I have the prime chicken round his neck, and thick cream, and beans. It's a treat beyond belief to have the best of everything. I've measured our farm all over and there's not a spot, not even a solitary grey rock to get a pot at. I hate the place."

Prudence ceased working and faced him. She seemed fully to understand him. "I see." At that moment she looked very picture-like with her dark skin turned up from the bottom and raised a soft hand to her mouth displaying an expanse of light blue petticoat. Her blouse was a simple thing in spotless white cotton, with a black ribbon tied about her neck.

"I think you are very ungrateful, Harvey," she said quietly. "I've only been home for a few months and not

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a day has passed but what I've heard you grumble about something in connection with your home. If it isn't the dullness it's the work, if it isn't the work it's your position of dependence, or the distance from town, or the people around us. Now you grumble because of the shooting. What do you want? We've got a section and a half, nearly a thousand acres, under wheat, we've got everything that money can buy in the way of improvements in machinery, we've got a home that might fill many a town bred man with envy, and a mother who loves us both ig., and yet you aren't satisfied. What do you want? If things aren't what you like, for goodness' sake go back to the wilds again, where according to your own account, you were happy. Your incessant grumbling makes me sick."

"A new departure, sister, eh?" Hervey retorted, smiling unpleasantly. "I always thought it was everybody's privilege to grumble a bit. Still I don't think it's for you to start lecturing me if even it isn't. Mother's treated me pretty well, in a way. But don't forget she's only hired me the same as she's hired Andy, or any of the rest of the hands. Why I haven't even the same position as you have. I am paid so many dollars a month, for which I have to do certain work. Let me tell you this, my girl, if I had stayed on this farm until father died my position would have been very different. It would all have been mine now."

"Well, since you didn't do so, the farm is mother's." Prudence's pale cheeks had become flushed with anger. "And I think all things considered, she has treated you particularly well."

And she turned back to her work.

The girl was very angry, and justifiably so. Hervey was lost. The work which was his was rarely done and as it happened to fall in with his when for the moment. He was thoroughly beastish to both his mother and herself and he had already overdriven the all since the former had made him. All this had become very evident to the girl since her return to the farm and it cut her to the quick that the peace of her home should have been so suddenly broken. Even Prudence's personal troubles were quite secondary to the steady grind of Hervey's ill manners.

Curiously enough, after the first passing of the shock

of Grey's death she found herself less stricken than she would have deemed possible. There could be no doubt that she had lived the two in her grief-absorbing fashion.

She had thought that never again would she return to the place where had such dread memories for her. Thoughts of the long, bitter days and the heavy, interminable winter when the restrictions of law and decree the farmer had been reverting to her. To live within a few miles of where that dreadful tragedy had occurred, to live among the people in which must ever be remembrance of her dead lover—these things had made her shrink from the thought of the time when she would again turn westward to her home.

But when she had once more taken her place in the daily life at the farm, it was at first with a certain feeling of self-distrust and later with the bitterness that she learned that she could face her old life with perfect equanimity. The childish passion for her dead lover had died, the shock which had suddenly brought about her own transition from girlhood to womanhood had also dispelled the illusions of her girlish first love.

She confided nothing to anybody but just went about her daily work in a calm, uncommunicative way, striving in every means to lighten her mother's burden and to help her brother to the path which their father before them had so diligently trodden.

Her patience had now given way under the weariness of it. Her eyes dimmed, and it seemed as though a rupture between them were imminent.

"Oh, well enough if you consider bare duty," Hervey retorted after a deliberate pause.

"It is duty, you call it." Hervey's two brown eyes flashed round on him in an instant. "You are the sort of man who should speak of duty. Hervey. You just ought to be ashamed of yourself. Your mother's debt of duty towards you was liquidated on the day you left the farm years ago. She provided you with liberal capital to start you in life. Now you have come back, and she welcomes you with open arms. we both do—glad that you should be with us again. And what return have you made to her for her goodness? I'll tell you, you have brought her nothing but days of unhappiness with your lazy, grumbling ways. If you are going to continue like

this, for goodness' sake go away again. She has enough on her shoulders without being worried by you."

The man looked for a moment as though he were going to give expression to some very nasty talk. Prudence had returned to her pane and so lost the evil glint of his expressive eyes. Then his look changed to a more pleasant smile, and when he spoke his words were decidedly conciliating.

"I'm afraid I've done you all up to a 'ead, you, Prue. But you all won't use hard words like that. I know I'm not much of a lawyer, and I am always a bit tentable when I am not my own master. But I don't like a quiet street. I wanted to talk to you about George Iredale. He seems a jolly decent fellow, I'm 'ab too good to be knocking his heels about in such a district as Owl Hoot. He's extremely wealthy, isn't he?"

The girl felt angry still, but Hervey's tone slightly mollified her. She answered shortly enough, and the skimping of the milk was not done with the adeptness which she usually displayed.

"Rich! Yes, he's one of the richest men in Manitoba. Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. He seems very interested in—us. He's always over here. And he never by any chance loses an opportunity of ingratiating himself with another. I wonder what his object is?"

Prudence bent over her work to hide the tell-tale flush which had spread over her face, and the skimping was once more done with the utmost care.

"Mother is very fond of Mr. Iredale," she replied slowly. "He is a good man and a good friend. We, as you know, ate his nearest neighbours. Are you going over there to-day?"

"I think so. Why?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter—I was going to ask you to ride over to Lakeville to ask Alice Gordon to come here during the harvesting. She's staying with the Covills. But it doesn't matter in the least. I can send one of the boys."

"Yes, better send one of the boys. I'm going over to Lonely Ranch. I shall cultivate Iredale; he's the only man I care about round here."

Prudence had only completed her operations and was salting the cream in the pan.

"Say, sis, did it ever strike you that Tredale's dead sweet on you?" Hervey went on coarsely.

The girl suddenly turned and looked her brother squarely in the face. Her brow was again flushed, but now with anger.

"You'll lose the best of your time if you don't hurry. You've got ten a' stock to do. And I'm going to look up."

Her brother didn't offer to move.

"Why do you do all this work?" he went on calmly. "Why don't you send all the milk to the Government creamery? It'll save labour, and you get market price for the produce."

"Here a' Government creameries are for those who can't afford to send their stuff to market, or make their cheese on their farms."

"Ah, that's the worst of being large farmers. It entails so much work. By Jove! Tredale doesn't work like we 'mos' backs' have to, and he's made a fortune. I guess if there were a Mrs. George Tredale she'd have a bully time. No cheese or butter making ab' sis!" And, with a grin, Hervey turned on his heel and, passing up the steps, walked away towards the barn.

Prudence waited until her brother had disappeared within the stables, then she looked up. As she turned from the door she heard her mother's voice calling.

"Girl—girl, where are you?"

"Here I am, mother dear, at the creamery."

Mrs. Mallings turned round the corner of the house.

"Prudence, there's a young Peter Lister come over and I haven't time to stop and gossip with him. Take as not be don't want to talk to a body like me, anyway. Just drop that skirt o' yours, girl, and go on and see him. A nice time o' day to come a-courting! He is be a-follerin' you to the grain fields when we're harvesting."

Prudence shamed.

"Never mind, mother. He's come at an opportune moment. I want a messenger to go over to Laketville. It is do. I'm sending word to Alice Gordon. I want her to come here for the harvesting. Alice must get very sick of living at Ansley, in spite of the fact of her beau living there. I've a good mind to tell her to bring him out here. Shant be long, dear. I'll join you directly. Where are you? In the wash house?"

The girl ran off, letting her skirt fall as she went. Then she hurried on to the wash house, muttering to herself as she went.

"No, if he were only like her. But there the fondness is, and there as hangs their offspring, to the world next alide the rocket. And I grieve him with the news about the house who didn't care a cent for his poor father. And I'm not going to be afraid to go to Ring around in Winnipeg. He's too fond of her company."

The old lady continued to flutter and fly until she reached the wretched house where she disappeared, and on the step, at the lights led his horse out of the barn, jumped on its back, and rode away.

It was now over. Hervey reached Owl Bluff. He had been there several times lately, sometimes at George Fredale's invitation, but generally at his own. He had his own particular reasons for cultivation of the owner of Lonesome Ranch, and those reasons he kept carefully to himself. This upcountry son had only been at Leon Dyke farm for little more than four months, and during that brief period he had plainly shown what manner of man he was. Even the dying affection of his mother had not much to do with his shortcoming. Each month since his return he had steadily overdrawn his oil-washer to the same terrible extent. His frequent visits to Waco, and had always ended in his return home with pockets empty, and an accumulation of debts of which he said nothing, left behind him. Then came the inevitable request for money, generally backed up by some plausible excuse, and Hiram's change book was always furthering on these occasions. But though hitherto she had not failed him, he saw by her manner that the time was not far distant when her sweet old face would become seriously set, and the comedy would end in a frown, and the change book would remain locked in her safe, while he passed his blunt excuses on stubble ears.

He understood his mother. She would do much  
perhaps for his wife for her children, but she would not  
risk herself to be preyed upon. She was too keen a b  
oy woman for that. Her son had a right to take  
as well as give, and all he was able to bring her for a wife

be but a drop in the ocean. In Winnipeg he posed as the owner of Leon Dyke farm, and as such his credit was extensive. But now there were claims owing for settlements, and it was known that gaining debts and hotel bills must be met in due course. Tradesmen can wait, they have a lease from owners of property, but the others have no such lease of repaying themselves. Therefore they must be paid if he wished to remain in the district. Now he meant to raise what he required from Fredale. He had no idea of the fact that Fredale was in love with Leonora, nor was he able to appreciate the possibilities which his mother's visit had as a money raising means. Yet, he very firmly, that Fredale should pay for the privilege of buying his master's liberty. Money he must have, and that at once.

It was a wild, desolate region which he made his way up by the way to Lonely Ranch. No one who has been so suddenly dropped into the midst of these wild, rugged, stony and clean-cut ravines, the boulder-strown, gravelless land, would have dreamed that they were within half-a-dozen miles of the fertile prairie lands of Canada. It was like a vision hidden away in the heart of a fashionable city. The country round the mysterious Lake of the Woods is something utterly apart from the rest of the Canadian world, and perhaps in each of the natural back-lands of Dakota. It is tucked away in the extreme south-eastern corner of Manitoba, and the international boundary runs right through the heart of it.

Lonely Ranch was situated in an abrupt hollow, and was entirely lost to view in a mammoth growth of pine woods. Years ago a settlement had existed in this region, but what the nature of that settlement it was now impossible to tell. Local tradition held that, at some far distant period, the place had been occupied by a camp of half-breed Indians who worked their ends trade upon the south side of the American border, and sought safety in the shelter of this perfect hidden place. Be that as it may, it was now the abode of one Leon Dyke, a settler. He had built for himself a splendid house of hewn logs, and his outbuildings—many of them the restored houses of the early settlers—and corrals formed a marsh of very large dimensions.

And it was all hidden away in black woods which defied the keenest observation of the passing by. And this is how we approached to a secret road which entered the cutting at its northern end. Any other mode of ingress was impossible for any beast of burden.

As Hervey entered the valley and became lost to view in the sombre woods, he was greeted by the cry of a greech owl. He could not understand what was the ear piercing cry that both horse and rider started. The horse threw up its head and snorted, and started for an instant trembling with apprehension. Hervey looked at it keenly. He could see nothing but the crowd of leafless tree trunks and a few tufts of moss which covered the surrounding earth. The owl was probably huddled in the hollow of some dead tree, for there were many about. He pressed his horse forward. The animal moved cautiously dawdling along in its nervous apprehension.

Presently as they crept up the air. Again some owl had protested at his intrusion.

So suddenly did the cry come that Hervey felt a slight spasm draw over pass down his back, but he rode on. He had nearly a mile of the valley to travel before he came to the house, and during the journey seven times more the hideous shriek of the owl. Now he began to understand why this place was called "the Haunt."

It was with a feeling of relief that he at length saw the ranch through the trees, and he greeted Irval, who was standing in his doorway when he dismounted with genuine pleasure.

"Well," he said, after shaking his host by the hand, "another mile of this darkness and I should have turned tail and fled back to the open. Why you must have a reg'lar colony of owls in the place. Man I never heard such a clattering noise. It was all that I haven't heard them before when I came here?"

Irval took his visitor's horse. He was dressed in uniform. Underneath his blouse, darkcolored vest he wore a soft shirt, and in place of a tie, what he had a red bandana tied about his neck. His head gear was a Stetson hat. In this garb he looked more manly and powerful than in the tweeds he usually wore, in riding at the farm. The strong patient face was lit by a quiet smile. He was a man whose eyes, and the

expression of his features, never betrayed his thoughts. A keen observer would have noticed this at once, but to such people as he encountered he merely appeared a kindly man who was not much given to talking.

"Colony of owls, eh?" he said, leading the horse in the direction of the barn. "These erez you have heard are what this cheerful place takes its name from. It only needs one cry to set the whole valley ringing with them. Had not the first creature seen you approach you might have reached your destination without hearing the disturbing sound. As a rule, in the daytime they are not heard, but at night no one can enter these woods without the echoes being aroused. When they begin to shriek there is no sleep for any one in my house."

"So I should say. Well, never mind them now, we have other matters on hand. What coverts are we going to shoot over first?"

Hervey had followed his host to the stable. A strange-looking little creature came from the obscurity within. He was no undersized man with a small face, which seemed somehow to have shrivelled up like a dead leaf. He had a pair of the small eyes Hervey had ever seen and not a vestige of hair on his face. His head was covered with a crown of bristly grey hair that seemed to grow in patches, and his feet were both turned in one direction—to the right.

"Take this plig and give him a rub down, Chanta," said Iredale. "When he's cool, water and feed him. Mr. Mallings won't need him until about eight o'clock."

Then he turned towards the house.

"He don't waste words," observed Hervey, indicating the man, who had silently disappeared into the stable, taking the horse with him.

"No, he's dumb," replied Iredale. "He's my head boy."

"Joy?"

"Yes. Sixty-two."

The two men passed into Iredale's sitting-room. It was plainly but comfortably furnished in a typical bush-for-manner. There were more signs of the owner's sporting propensities in the room than anything else, the walls being arranged with gun-racks, fishing-tackle, and trophies of the chase.

"We'll draw the bush on the other side of the knoll it's otherwise known as the 'Haunted Hill'—and before pointing to a gun in fact. "Select your weapon, I say, and take a mixed box—ten and twelve. We have no lead shot. There are some geese in a swamp over that way. The cartridges are in the bush case. Help yourself to a good supply and one of those haversacks."

Hervey did as his host suggested.

"Why 'Haunted Hill'?" he asked curiously.

Iredale shrugged.

"By reason of a little graveyard on the side of it. Evidently where the early settlers buried their dead. It is a local name, I suppose, by the peasants folk of your neighbourhood. Come on."

The two men set out. Nor did they return until an hour. Their shoot was productive of a splendid bag—pigeons, chaffinch and geese. Both men were excellent shots. The ale was perhaps the better of the two, at least he bag numbered two brace more than that of his companion, but then as Hervey told himself, he was using a strange gun, whilst Iredale was using the weapon he most favoured. Hervey was prepared by the time they returned to the house. Iredale, healthily hungry and calmly contented sat down to the meal. Hervey famished by his unusual exercise joined him in the loudest of good spirits.

Towards the close of the meal, when the whisky and water Hervey had liberally primed himself with had had due effect, he broached the subject that was ever uppermost in his thoughts. He began expansively—

"You know George," he had already adopted the familiarity, and Iredale had not tried to show disapproval, probably he remembered the relationship between the man and Prudence, "I'm sick of farming. It's too monotonous. Not only that, so long as mother lives I am a better than a breed man. Of course she's very good," he went on as he met a sudden lowering of his companion's eyelids, "does no end for me, and all that sort of thing, but my society goes nowhere with a man who has well who has. Iredale had considerable resources. It's no easy thing under the circumstances to keep my expenses down. It seems such nonsense, when one comes to think of it, that I, who will eventually own

the farm, subject, of course, to some payment for Prairie to put up with a trifling amount paid out to the every month— it is truly monstrous. Who ever heard of a hundred thousand dollars a month?" That's what I am getting. And I have more than five months wages at the Northern Union Hotel in Winnipeg. It can't be done; that's all about it."

Iredale looked over at the dark face opposite him. Nor could he help drawing a comparison between the man and the two ladies who owned him, one as brother, the other as son. How utterly unlike them he was in every way. There was not the smallest resemblance in mind, face or figure. His thoughts reverted to Sam Mag, and here they paused. Here was the resemblance of outward form, and he wondered what unfortunate deed he had born in the nature of the old fellow which could have caused created themselves in such developed form to the man. It was inconceivable that this incident, so far as wealth and health could have inherited his nature from Sam Mag. No, he felt sure that some former ancestor must have been responsible for it. He understood the taste of Hervey a man is in a twinkling. He had experienced this sort of thing before from other men. Now he did not discourage it.

"A boy needs a mother on the prairie should he a princely or a pauper," he said in his grave way. "Of course it might be different in a city."

"It is," said Hervey decidedly. "I don't know, I'm sure," he went on, after a moment's pause. "I suppose I must weather through somehow."

He looked across at Iredale in such a definitely meaning way that the latter had no hesitation in speaking plainly. He knew it was Hervey, and this was Prudence's brother.

"Get into a mess?" he suggested encouragingly.

Hervey felt that he had an easy victim, but he smoked pensively for a moment before he spoke, keeping his great eyes turned now and again upon the table-cutter.

"I am. I lost a lot of money at poker the last time I was in the city. I was in an awful streak of bad luck, could do nothing right. Generally it's the other way about. Now they're pressing me to redeem the I.O.U.s. When they owe me I notice they're not so eager about it."

"That's bad, I'm sorry to hear it." Iredale's eyes

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were smiling at him then. For the time was the faintest  
of spring, of iron. He was in no way interested in it by  
the breadth of the continent. It was the old story.  
He, too, lit his pipe and sat back in his chair. "I hope  
the amount is not too overwhelming. If I can—er—  
be—"

Hervey interrupted him eagerly. He brought his  
hand down heavily upon the table.

"By Jove! you are a good sort, George. If you could  
—just a few, of course— you see I can offer you a sum  
on my certain inheritance of the farm."

But Tredale had no wish to hear anything about his  
future possible title of inheritance. He interrupted him  
sharply and his tone was one of rebuke.

"Tot tot man! Never mind us, I that. In spite  
of your need of cash—I hope it'll be many a year  
before your mother leaves our farming world."

"I trust so," murmured Hervey, without enthusiasm.

"How much?—a thousand?—a thousand?"

Tredale spoke with such indifference about the amount  
that Hervey at once decided to double the sum he  
originally intended to ask for.

"Five thousand dollars," he said, with some show of  
diffidence, but with the eyes that gazed hungrily towards this  
man who treated the loaning of a large amount in such a  
careless manner.

Tredale offered no comment. He merely rose from his  
seat, and opening a drawer in his bookcase, produced a  
cheque-book and a pen and ink. He made out a cheque  
for the amount named, and passed it across the table.  
His only remark was—

"Your kick may change. Pay me when you like. No,  
don't bother about a receipt."

Hervey seized upon the piece of paper. He was almost  
too staggered to tender his thanks. Tredale in his quiet  
way was watching—not was any movement on his com-  
panion's part lost to his observant eyes. He had "size'd"  
this man up, from the soles of his boots to the crown of  
his head at a but contempt. The man was prof—id. But  
he gave no sign. His cordiality was apparently perfect.  
The five thousand dollars were nothing to him, and he  
felt that the giving of that cheque might save those of

Loon Dyke Farm from a world of anxiety and trouble. Somehow behind that impassive face he may have had some thoughts of the coming of a future time when he would be able to deal with this man's mode of life with that firmness which only real wisdom could give him to when he could pass on to these Highlamb of the responsibility and wearing anxiety of her worthless son's doings. In the meantime like the seafaring man, he would just "stand by."

"I can't thank you enough, George," said Hervey at last. "You have got me out of an awkward situation. If I can do you a good turn, I will." Iredale detected a meaning emphasis in the last remark which he resented. "Some day," the man went on, "but there - I will say no more."

"No, I shouldn't say anything. These things happen in the course of a lifetime, and one mustn't say too much about them." The two men then smoked on in silence.

Presently Hervey rose to go. It was nearly eight o'clock.

"Well," said Iredale, as he prepared to bid his guest good-bye, "we have had a good afternoon's sport. Now you know my coverts you must come over again. Come whenever you like. If I am unable to go with you, you are welcome to shoot over the land by yourself. There are some grand antelope about the place."

"Thanks. I shall certainly come again. And - well, when are you coming over to us again? I can't offer you any shooting."

"Don't trouble," smiled Iredale.

Hervey saw the "boy" at its leading his horse round. "You might tell your mother," the raconteur went on, "that I'll come to-morrow to look over that fencing contract she spoke about for her."

Hervey leered round upon him.

"Will it do if I tell Prue instead?"

"Certainly not." Iredale's face was quite expressionless at that moment. "You will please do as I ask."

Hervey groped down his chin, but his eyes were alight with the anger from which his lips refrained. He mounted his horse.

"Well, good-bye, George," he said, with a great display

of cordiality. "I hope those evils of yours will permit me to ride in peace."

"I have no doubt they will," replied Tredale with an inscrutable smile. "Good-bye."

Hervey rode away. The man he had left remained standing at his front door. The heavy rain had turned the saddle as the bush closed about him.

"Come the man for his d — d superiority," he muttered. "I suppose he thinks I am bad. Well, Mr. Tredale, we've made a pleasant start from my point of view. If you intend to marry Prudence you'll have to pay the piper. Guess I'm that piper. It's money I want, and it's money you'll have to pay."

The mysterious owner of *Loco & Koch* was thinking deeply as he watched his guest depart.

"I believe he's the greatest scoundrel I have ever come across," he said to himself. "Money? Why, he'd sell his soul for it, or I'm no judge of men of his class, and worse luck, I know his soul well enough. I wonder what made me do it? Not for his sake, I'm certain. Not quite exactly. And yet, I don't know. I think I'd sooner have him on my side than against me." Then he raised his eyes towards the east and south. The gloom which was dotted about amongst the trees and bushes, was settled upon a little clearing on the side of his little hill. It was a graveyard of the early settlers. "Yes, I must break away from it all, and as soon as possible. I have to go on for many a year, but the last straw of it has held me. If I hope to ever marry Prudence I must give it up. I must not dare not let her discover the truth. The child's goodness drives me to desperation. Yes, it shall all go."

The gate wandered in the direction Hervey had taken and a troubled look came into his calm eyes. A moment later he turned suddenly with a shiver and passed into the house. Somehow his thoughts were very gloomy.

## CHAPTER X

### THE GRAVEYARD AT OWL HOLLOW

PREDENCE and Alice Gordon surveyed the wild scene that lay before them. They had drawn their horses up to a standstill on the brow of no inconsiderable hill, and beyond stretched a panorama of strikingly primitive beauty. Nature in one of her noblest moments—grand and profound—was revealed.

Alice was a pretty girl, rather ordinary, and ever ready to blight, which helped to conceal an undecurrent of semi-thought. She was an old pupil of Sarah Gurridge's, and consequently Proctor's school-friend. But Alice lived in Ainsley where, report had it, she was "keeping company" with Ruth Chillingwood, and now the two girls only met when Alice visited the farm at such seasons of the year as the present.

"Do you think it will be safe to go further?" asked Alice, in a tone of awe-struck amazement. "You say you are sure of the way. Would it not be better to turn off here and make for Lonely Ranch, and seek Chaz's guidance? There is time enough, and it is so easy to get lost."

The girls had set out to visit Lonely Ranch, to enjoy a ramble and a sort of picnic in the surrounding woods. Iredale was away on business, and the two friends, availing themselves of the opportunity, were taking a day off from the duties of the farm. They had started with the intention of riding over and leaving their horses with Iredale's man, Chaz, and then proceeding on foot. At the last moment Predence had changed her mind and decided on a visit to the great Lake of the Woods, which was two miles further on to the south-west of the ranch. They carried their provisions in their saddle-bags, and

had made up their minds to find some suitable break in the woods on the shore of the lake where they could let her horses and, in the afternoon away.

Instead of turning into the valley of Owl Hollow they had crossed the mouth of it, and were now at the summit of its eastern slope, gazing out upon the mysteries of the almost uninhabited regions beyond.

"Of course it's safe, you silly," said Prudence. "Why suppose we were to lose ourselves that old mare you are riding would take you home straight as the crow flies. Besides, I have no fancy for that ferret-faced Chantz becoming one of our party. We could never talk freely in front of him."

"All right, then," said Alice, with a sigh. "You are leader of this expedition. Isn't the woods look gloomy? And look out beyond. There seems to be no end to them. Shall we stop and have dinner here, and ride on afterwards?"

"Certainly not, madam," Prudence said briskly. "No jinking besides, we want water to make our tea. There's none here."

Prudence understood her friend's fears, which were not without reason. It was a simple thing to get lost in such a forest. But anyway as she had said, the old prairie horses they were riding would carry them home should they mistake the road. There was really no danger.

It was a glorious day. The sun was shining with unabated splendor, as yet it wanted an hour to noon. The brilliant daylight was somehow different here to what it was on the prairie. The fierce sunlight poured down upon an unbroken carpet of dark green, which seemed to have in it a tinge of the blackness of the heavy tree trunks which it concealed beneath. The result was curiously striking. The brightness of the day was dulled, and the earth seemed bathed in a peculiar light such as a vault of grey masonry above it bestows. The girls, gazing into the valley which lay just at their feet, were looking into a half-wet hollow of sombre melancholy unchanged, unrelieved.

Beyond stretched a vista of hills growing steadily greater as the hazy distance was reached. Behind where

they stood on the Owl Hoot valley and woodlands in full sombre, until the peace was reached.

The moments passed and they made no effort to move. They were to think in thought and word - to witness the wild woodsounds with eyes which reflected only that which was most profoundly beautiful. Prudence was enjoying the scene, the red tent car which rose from the woods before the antique gravestones, the world about her with all its softness, the young red girl. All were to be seen and smelled at the picture before her. She was less enthusiastic, less wild in her surroundings than her companion. They affected her differently. She was not she quondam. The joy of her present was muted by what she beheld. At length Prue set forth the ~~silence~~. She lifted her form and her hands moved forward.

"Come along Alice - the road. And the two descended down the slope into the giant forest below.

Once on the way Alice recited her past events again. At first the forest trees did not seem so vast or confusing to the eye. On either hand ahead, were to be seen only huge tree trunks, with a ponderous green canopy which shot out the sunlight from above. The sound of the pines were crushing under the hands of the leaves earned a welcome sense of companionship to the riders. Alice found her ready much less fearful than the contemplation from the heights above. In a few moments both girls were chatting gaily of thoughts of losing themselves, or of other dangers which their virgin forests might concern having passed from their minds.

Whatever doubts may have assailed Alice they were soon set at rest, for in a short time after descending another rather sharp slope, they found themselves going down upon a long narrow sheet of water. It was one of the many inlets with which the shores of the mysterious Lake of the Woods abounded. From where the girls first caught sight of it, it looked as though the forest had been cleanly rent by the glistening water which had cut its way into the dense growth, demolishing every sign of vegetation in its path, but leaving everything which grew even down to its very edge. The inlet widened out between two banks, and beyond that, in a dazzling haze, the vast body

of the lake like a distant view of the sea, was just visible. It was a perfect picture.

"Isn't it gorgeous?" said Prudence enthusiastically.

"Isn't it worth a few miles ride to see it?" I'm glad we didn't go and better that horrid little Chota. It would have taken half the pleasure away to have had his screechy face with us."

"Fascinatingly lovely," exclaimed Alice rapturously. Her bright eyes were dancing with delight, and her breath came and went rapidly. "Just fancy, Prue, I have lived all these years within reach of this place and this is the first time I have ever set eyes upon the lake."

Her companion laughed.

"That is not to be wondered at. There are very few people who ever come this way. Why, I reckon it may be less than that the country is bad to travel through on this side. Mind, although there are few habitations on the western shore there are plenty to the east and south. I never could understand why George Fredale selected that spot for the site of his ranch. I at least think it's delightful. I would have a ranch here if I had that hell." The girl indicated their position with her riding whip. "Wouldn't it be delightful to wake each morning and gaze out upon such a scene?"

"Perfect," said Alice, whilst her eyes gleamed mischievously in her friend's direction. "Summer or winter?"

"Summer, of course, you know," exclaimed Prudence.

"Of course, winter would be different wouldn't it?" Alice was laughing, but Prudence was quite serious.

"Yes, that is the worst of all Nature's boons, hard-work. There's always some drawback to it. High winter in this place would be too dreadful to contemplate. These hills are only fit for Indians and coyotes and wolves when the summer is over."

"But it's a heavenly spot now," said Alice. Suddenly she raised her whip and pointed far down, out upon the surface of the silvery belt of water a tiny speck was slowly moving. At first so distant was it that it appeared to be stationary, but after a while it was distinctly to be seen moving. "What is it?" she exclaimed sharply.

"Looks like a boat," replied Prudence. "I wonder where?"

"I give it up. Does Mr. Tredale keep a boat?"

Although Prudence was the elder of the two girls she was much the sunnier. She was overfull of the present. She had no suspicion of the apparent & innocent injury.

"I don't think so. I never really heard. No, I should think that must belong to some Indians or half-breed Indians. There are some of those people about, I believe."

She continued to watch the boat for some moments. The long serious girl beside her allowed her attention to wander. Prudence saw the boat approach the near shore. Then it disappeared under the shadow of the towering pines. An exclamation from Alice drew her attention.

"Look over the other side, Prue, there's another boat. It has just shot out from that great clump of under-growth. Why, there are six men people in it. Look! They are racing along. Where's the other boat?"

It disappeared under this bank. Ah, the other one is following in its wake. Yes, I should say those are Indians.

"Let us go on down. We can see better from the bank. My curiosity is aroused. I didn't know there was so much going on here. Mr. Tredale never speaks of it."

"I don't think Mr. Tredale sees much of the lake. His land, that is his grazing, lies to the west of the house. It's he rarely talks about his work. As he says, so few people care about this wild district that he does not like to worry folks by remonstrating them of its existence."

All the same "rested Alice." "One of these fine days some enterprising American will come along and find out more at present unknown wealth in the place and then the settlers round the district will look themselves. That's a Canadian he's sitting down on his hundred and fifty acres and never moving beyond the limits of his property. I like this weird place with its woods, its hills and valleys, its lakes and its mysterious boats. You should draw George. I mean Mr. Tredale out. There must be a deal that is of interest here."

"Why should I draw him out?" asked Prudence innocently as the horses walked down the hill towards the shore of the lake. "You ask him. I believe he'd like to tell you all about it."

"No, thanks, friend Prue," said Alice, "I'm not what you might call a 'free agent.' I am a young man, to wit, a son from Hobbs, who might object. Besides, I have not turned poacher yet."

"What on earth do you mean?"

Prudence turned a pair of astonished brown eyes on her companion. Alice did not answer, and the two looked squarely into each other's faces. The elder girl read the meaning which Alice did not attempt to conceal, and a warm blush mounted quickly and a flushed her sun-tanned face.

Then followed a long silence, and the crackling of the pine-logs beneath the hearth. In the silence arose the voices of the woods. Prudence was thinking deeply. A thoughtful pink touched the perfect arch of her brows, and her half veiled eyes were turned upon her horse's mane.

George Iredale. What? I do not? He seemed so to have grown into her life of late that she would now scarce recognize Leon Deake Farm without him. This sudden remembrance made her look back over the days since her return from "down East" and she realized that George, since that time, had eternally formed part of her life. He was always in her thoughts in some way or other. Every one on the farm spoke of him as if he belonged to it. Hardly a day passed but what some portion of it was spent by him in her company. His absence was only when his business took him elsewhere.

And what was the meaning of it all? What was he to her that her friend should talk of "poaching" when regarding her own intercourse with this man? Prudence's face grew livelier. The awakening had come. At that moment she knew that George Iredale was a good deal to her, and she felt a certain maidenly shame at the discovery. He had never uttered a word of love to her, not one, in all the years she had known him, and unbolden she had given him her love. In those first moments of realization her heart was filled with something like joy which was not wholly without a feeling of pity. She felt herself flushing under the lights conjured by her friend's implication, and her feelings became worse as Alice went on.

"Ah, Prue, you can't hide these things from me. I have always intended to say something, but you are such an austere person that I was afraid I get 'g a snub. Mr. Fredale is a charming man, and—well—I hope when it comes off you'll be very, very happy."

"Don't be absurd, Alice!" Prudence had recovered herself now.

"My dear Prue," the girl retorted emphatically, and imitating the other's voice tone, "George Fredale just worships the ground you walk on. One word of encouragement from you, if you haven't already given it to him, and in a short time you will be the mistress of Loyal Ranch."

"Nothing of the sort."

"My dear girl, I know."

"You know it all, so you think you do, and I am not going to let you tell me more of your nonsense."

Prudence touched her horse's flank with her heel and trotted on ahead of her companion. But in her heart she knew that what Alice had said was true.

Alice called after her to wait. The trees were so closely set that she had difficulty in steering clear of them, but Prudence was obstinate and kept right on. Nor did she draw rein until the shore of the lake was reached, and then only did she do so because of the impenetrable tangle of undergrowth which confronted her. Just as Alice came up with her she started off again at right angles to the direction they had come, riding parallel with the bank. Alice, breathless and laughing, followed in her wake, until at length a break in the trees showed them a grassy patch which sank slowly down in a gentle declivity to the water's edge. By the time this was reached Prudence's good humour was quite restored.

"A nice dance you've led me," expostulated Alice, as they dismounted and began to off saddle.

"Serve you right for your impertinence," Prudence smiled over at the other.

"All the same I'm right."

"Now keep quiet, or I'll ride off again and leave you."

"So you can if you like—this old mare I'm riding will take me home straight as the crow flies. What's that?"

Out across the water came a long-drawn cry, so weird

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not human that the two girls stand still as statues, their faces blanching under the sun. The echo seemed to be the grating of stone after and after. Alice's eyes were wide staring out, and with an expression of horror she recovered herself first. She laughed a little constrainedly, however.

"We are in the region of that Moat," she said significantly. "That was one of the screen walls."

"Gosh! I thought it was some one being murdered."

"We shall probably hear lots of strange craft these nights, accustomed for them. You go get the kettle on you callie, Al. Get all the things out whilst I gather some kindling and make a fire."

"I guess you take care, leave me here about the log," Alice entreated. "I won't mention George & home again, sure."

The blonde had tethered her horse and set off on her quest. She left alone, secured her horse and proceeded to drag up the contents of her saddle bags, and also those on her friend's saddle. This done, she stepped down to the water's edge, and pushing the rank vegetation of reeds aside, filled the kettle. As she rose from her task she looked out down the wide inlet. The view was an enchanting one. The wooded bank opposite her rose abrupt from the water, overshadowing it, and throwing a black reflection upon its surface. There was not a breath of wind stirring, the air seemed moist, only still.

Away to the left the water widened out, and was overhung by a haze of boat. She was about to turn away when, from out of the distance, there appeared another long boat. Instantly the girl was all attention. This boat was not traveling in the same direction as were those they had first seen, but was making for the point where the others had appeared. She had a much better view down here at the bank of anything moving on the lake than from the higher land, and she could not help being struck by the fact that whatever the occupants of the strange craft, they were not Indians. One man was standing in the stern steering the boat by the aid of a long paddle, and this man was gaunt, in white man's attire. The distance she was away from the object of her curiosity prevented her distinguishing the features of these people.

of the lake; but that which was apparent to her was the fact that they were not fishermen, nor was their boat a fisher-boat. It was long, and built with the narrowness of a tree-lake canoe, and so low in the water that its gunwale looked to be within an inch of the gummy surface.

So intent was the girl upon this strange affair, that she did not notice Prudence's return, and as the strange craft disappeared within the undergrowth of the opposite shore she turned with a start at the sound of her friend's voice beside her.

"Another boat," asked Prudence, "or the one we saw before?"

"Another."

There was a silence; then the two turned away and prepared their dinner.

They pitched their camp in the shade, and the meal was quickly prepared. The smoke from their fire helped to keep off the few late summer mosquitoes that hummed drowsily upon the sultry air. Everything was wonderfully peaceful and sleepy about their little encampment. Not a leaf stirred or a bough creaked, there was the stillness of death over all. Gradually the silence communicated itself to the girls, and the pauses in their chatter grew longer and their eyes more thoughtful. Even their horses for the most part stood idly by. The green grass had but a passing attraction for them. They nibbled at it occasionally, it is true, but with apparently little appetite. After dinner the two friends spread their saddle-blankets upon the grass, and stretched themselves thereon in attitudes of comfort, from which they could look out across the shining surface of the lake, and soon their talk almost entirely ceased. Then, for a while they lay dreaming the time away in happy waking dreams of the future.

Alice had bridged for a moment the miles which divided Owl Hoot from Andley, and her thoughts were with her sturdy lover, Robt Chilwood. She was contemplating their future together that future which would contain 'of them, if no great ease and luxury, at least the happiness of a perfect love and mutual assistance in times of trial. Her practical mind did not permit her to gaze on visionary times of prosperity and rues to position, but rather she

considered their power — ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> inciting, and what they too could do with it — ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> and again she sat silent with a feeling of discontent, but mostly at the thought of her own ~~calmness~~ <sup>calmness</sup> in regard to her future ~~happiness~~ <sup>happiness</sup>. She was in a serious mood and pondered long upon these to her ab<sup>o</sup> portant things.

Fredrica's thoughts were of a very different nature although she too was thinking of the time when her simple education had brought no progressive ~~knowledge~~ <sup>knowledge</sup> to her. Her mind dark then was elevated with a flood of new thoughts, and at first the dominant note of her thoughts was her ~~desire~~ <sup>desire</sup> to the new state of her own feelings. Now everything was dear to her of the time in which George Iredale had steadily grown into her dearest ~~dear~~ <sup>dear</sup> and but her own friends along for him had already ripened into ~~growing~~ <sup>growing</sup> wiser. He was to ~~set~~ <sup>set</sup> so ~~so~~ <sup>so</sup> attractive, so good and kind. She now knew she had grown accustomed to look for and abide by his ~~friendship~~ <sup>friendship</sup> in matters which required more consideration than she could give matters which were beyond her. She understood the strong silent nature which underlay the quiet ~~form~~ <sup>form</sup>. And now when she came to think of it, it was to days of her growth when her heart had never been near her, touching her ~~so~~ <sup>so</sup> sweetly always. There was ~~not~~ <sup>not</sup> that brief period during which Leslie Grey had ~~swayed~~ <sup>swayed</sup> her heart with his tempestuous ~~ways~~ <sup>ways</sup> for the rest it was Iredale. She tried to shut him out, to content ~~plate~~ <sup>plate</sup> her mind from the round of her daily life. Instantly the rest ~~rest~~ <sup>rest</sup> of that life lost its bright new and exciting and her soul appeared to her a very dreary image of ~~nothing~~ <sup>nothing</sup>. Yes, Alon had sounded the keynote, and Fredrica's heart had responded with the chord in sympathy. She knew now that she loved George Iredale.

This realisation was not wholly pleasant, for with it came a sudden grip of fear at her simple heart. Her thoughts went back to some eight months before. And she found herself again looking into the death-chamber of the Louis the Fifteenth house. That scene had no longer power to move her, at least not in the way one might have expected. She no longer loved the dead man. He had passed from her thoughts as though she had never

ated for him. But a new feeling had sprung up in her heart which the realization of his indifference had brought. And this feeling filled her with an utter self-hatred. She shuddered as she thought of her own heartlessness, the shadow nature which was hers. She remembered her feelings at that bedside as she listened to the dying man's last words. Worst of all, he remembered how, in the paroxysm of her grief, she had sworn to discover the murderer of Leslie Grey and see justice administered. Now she asked herself, What had she done? And the answer came in all its callous gentleness.

Nothing!

She scolded herself, her face was very pale. Her thoughts flashed then always to those unspoken words.

"If this is the way I have fulfilled my promise to the end of this is the extent and depth of my love, then I am the most worthless woman on earth. What surely can I give this my love for George is a better thing than was my affection for Leslie Grey."

She sat herself up, she looked over at her companion and noted the drooping eyelids. Her features were strangely set, and her smooth forehead wore a distressing frown. Then she spoke in a sharp tone that startled the girl beside her.

"Alice, do you think it is possible to imagine you are in love with a man. I mean, don't you honestly believe you love him at the time and really do not?"

Alice endeavoured to collect her wandering thoughts.

"Why, yes, I suppose so. I've been in love with a dozen men at one time and another, never longer than a month with any one of them. I never go to a dance but what I find myself with at least two of my partners, and my undying affection for both just keeps the evening out. Imagination is strongly developed in some people - when they're young."

"No, be serious."

Alice gazed at the other curiously. Then—

"But without love. What is it that's troubling you? Your face is pale, heart of some dire tragedy."

"How long have you been engaged to Robb Chillingwood?"

"Nearly six months. Why?"

"And you've never thought of any other man?"

Alice shook her head. "For once she was quite serious.

"Couldn't look at another man. Robb hasn't got two cents to his name, but I'm going to marry him or—or die an old maid."

For a moment the expression of Prudence's face relaxed but a moment later it set itself into more stern lines than ever.

"Alice, you were right in what you said about George; she went on slowly. "I can hardly believe it myself yet. Leslie Grey was only here dead eight months, and yet here I am thinking all day long of another man. I believe I am utterly heartless - worthless."

"Well?"

"Well, it's just this. I am not worth an honest man's love. I used to think I worshipped the ground poor Leslie walked on. I'm sure I loved him to distraction," the girl went on passionately. "Very well, suppose George asked me to marry him and I consented. In all probability, in the light of what has gone before, I should be tired of him in a year, and then - and then—"

"You're talking nonsense now, Prie," said Alice. She was astounded at the other's tone. The beautiful face of her friend was quite pale, and sharp lines were drawn about the mouth.

"I'm not talking *not* sense," the other went on in a tense, bitter tone. "What I say is true. In less than eight months I have forgotten the dead. I have done nothing to discover the murderer who robbed me of a husband and lover. I have simply forgotten—forgotten him. Put yourself in my place, put your Robb in Leslie's place. What would you have done?"

Alice thought seriously before she answered.

"I should never have rested until I had avenged his death," she said at last, and a hard glint shone in her eyes. Then a moment after she smiled. "But it is different. I don't think you really loved Leslie Grey. You merely thought you did."

"That only makes it worse," the other retorted. Prudence's face was alight with inflexible resolve. "My debt to the dead must be paid. I see it now in a light in

which it has never presented itself to me before. I must prove myself to myself before I let go." She broke off, or was to resume again with a fierce and passionate earnestness of which Alice had never believed her capable.

"I can never marry George Tristola with Justice's unavenged death upon my conscience. But I never trust myself. George may have the now. I believe it is him best. No, Alice, I will never marry him until I see it to be his desire to be hilted. This shall be my punishment for my heartless forgetfulness."

Alice deserved her friend for some time without speaking. Then she burst out into a smothered speech.

"You are mad, I see, mad mad, at least mad. You would throw away a life's happiness for the mere shadow of what you are pleased to consider a duty. Worse you would destroy a man's happiness for a moment of pleasure. What can you do? Can do avenging? Even death? You had no clue. What the police have failed to know how can you hope to unravel? If I were a man, do you know what I'd do to you? I'd take you into the other room and shake you until that foolish head of yours is threatened to part company with your equally foolish body. You had had the thought of these things before and not now when you realize how fond you are of George, set about wrecking two healthy lives. Oh, Mrs. Tristola, are a fool! And I can scarcely keep my temper with you!" Alice paused for want of breath and lack of energy for indignation. She alone was looking out across the water. Her expression was quite unchanged. At last all the warped living vision of the feminine in Alice had surrendered the path on which she considered her duty to lie, and was resolved to follow it.

"I have a better clue than you perceive, Alice," she said thoughtfully. "the dead body lying where I understand has reference to the *Winnipeg Free Press*. That must be the reason by which the secret is discovered that we were not honest business who did him to death. And I will tell you something else. The notice in that paper to which he referred you know is even now inserted at certain times. The man or men who issue that notice to be inserted in the paper dare in some way responsible for his death."

There was a moment's pause. Then Alice spoke quite calmly.

"Tell me, Prue, has George proposed yet?"

"No."

"Ah!" And Alice smiled broadly and turned her eyes towards the setting sun. When she spoke again it was to draw attention to the time. As though by common consent the matter which had been under discussion was left in abeyance.

"It is time to be moving," the girl said. "See, the sun will be down in an hour. Let us have tea and then we'll saddle-up."

Tea was prepared, and by the time the sun dropped below the horizon the horses were re-saddled and Alice was ready for the return journey. They set out for home. Alice was in the cheeriest of spirits, but Prudence was preoccupied, even moody. That afternoon spent in the peaceful woods of the "back" country had left its mark upon her. All her life—her world—seemed suddenly to have changed. It was as though this second coming of love to her had brought with it the banking clouds of an approaching storm. The two rode Indian fashion through the woods and neither spoke for a long time, then, at last, it was Alice who ventured a protest.

"Where are you leading us to, Prue?" she asked. "I am sure this is not the way we came."

Prudence looked round; she seemed as though she had only just awakened from some uneventful dream.

"Not the way?" she echoed. Then she drew her horse up sharply. She was alert in an instant. "I'm afraid you're right, Al." Then in a tone of perplexity, "Where are we?"

Alice stared at her companion with an expression of dismay.

"Oh, Prue, you've gone and lost us—and the sun is already down."

Prudence gazed about her blankly for a few moments, realizing only too well how truly her companion had spoken. She had not the vaguest notion of the way to s'bul come. The forest was very dark. The day-long twilight which reigned beneath the green had darkened with the shadows of approaching night. There was no

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opening to view anywhere, there was nothing but the world of trees, and beneath their horses' feet, the soft carpet of rotting vegetation whilst every instant the gloom was deepening to darkness—a darkness blacker than the blackest night.

"What shall we do?" asked Alice, in a tone of horror. Then: "Shall we go back?"

Prudence shook her head. Her proune instincts were roused now.

"No; come along, give your mare her head. Our horses will find the way."

They touched the animals sharply and, in response they moved forward reluctantly. The old mare Alice was riding took the lead and the journey was continued. The gloom of the forest communicated something of its depressing influence to the travellers. There was no longer any attempt at talk. Each was intent upon ascertaining their whereabouts and watching the alert movements of the horse heads and ears. The darkness had closed in in the forest with startling suddenness, and, in consequence, the progress was slow, but, in spite of this, the assurance with which the horses moved, brought confidence to the minds of the two girls. Prudence was in no way disturbed. Alice was not quite so calm. For an hour they travelled the trail through the endless mass of trees. They climbed hills and descended into valleys, but still no break in the dense foliage above. They had just emerged from one hollow deeper and wider than the rest, and were slowly ascending a steep hill when Prudence was suddenly struck by an idea.

"Alice," she said, "I believe we are heading for the ranch. The paths all run north and south hereabouts. We are travelling westwards."

"I hope so," replied the other decidedly; "we shall then be at a to get on the right trail for home. This is jolly miserable. O—oh!"

The girl's exclamation was one of horror. A screech owl had just sent its dreadful note in melancholy waves out upon the still night air. It started low, almost plaintive, rose with a hideous crescendo to fortissimo, and then died away like the wail of a lost soul. It came from just ahead of them and to the right. Alice's heart

shied and danced nervously. Prudence's horse stood stock still. "Then, as no further sound came, they started forward again.

"My, but those owls are dreadful things," said Alice. "I believe I nearly fainted."

"Come on," said Prudence. "After all they are only harmless owls." Her consolatory words were as much for the benefit of her own nerves as for those of her friend.

The brow of the hill was passed and they began to descend the other side. Suddenly they saw the twinkling of stars ahead. Alice first caught sight of the welcome clearing.

"An opening at last, Prue; now we shall find out where we are." A moment later she turned again. "Aha!" she said. "That must be the ranch. Quick, come along."

The blackness of the wood gave place to the starlit darkness of the valley. They were about to pass out into the open when suddenly Alice's horse came to a frightened stand. For an instant the mare swerved, then she reared and turned back whence she had come. Prudence checked her horse and looked for what had frightened the other animal.

A sight so weird presented itself that she suddenly raised one hand to her face and covered her eyes in nervous terror. Alice had regained the mastery of her animal and now drew up alongside the other. She looked, and the sharp catching of her breath told of what she saw. Suddenly she gripped Prudence's arm and drew the girl's hand from before her face.

"Keep quiet, Prue," she whispered. "What is this place?"

"The Owl Hoot graveyard. This is the Haunted Hill."

"And those?" Alice was pointing fearfully towards the clearing.

"Are—— Oh, come away, I can't stand it."

But neither girl made a move to go. Their eyes were fixed in a gaze of burning fascination upon the scene before them. Dark, almost black, the surrounding woods threw up in relief the clearing lit by the stars. But even so the scene was indistinct and uncertain. A low broken

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there surrounded a small patch of ground in the middle of which stood a ruined log hut. In the middle of the most eastern half of the ground, in the middle of a garden, was planted in the centre of an irregular mound of earth, here and there a clod of straw marked the grave of some dead and gave present of their blood, and a few shrubs had sprung up as though to further indicate these ancient sepulchres. But it was not these things which had filled the imagination with such horrors. It was the crowd of silent floating figures that seemed to come from out of one of the unmarked graves, and pass, in regular procession, to amongst the ruins of the log hut and then disappear. To the giddy distorted faces they seemed to be shrouded human forms. Their forms were bending by reason of their heads being held forward under the pressure of some strange burden which rested on their shoulders. Many of these grave-dwelling phantoms rose from out of the ground and passed before their eyes staring eyes and sharp pointed ears of the same. Not a sound was made by their swift trudging feet. They seemed to float over the ground. Then all became still again. Nothing moved but was there even the rustle of a leaf upon the boughs above. The stars became brighter and the calm of the night was undisturbed. Alice's grip fell from her companion's arm. Her brows raised and plunged, then taking the hut between her teeth, it set off down the hill in the direction of Frederic's house. The light which had burned in one of the windows had suddenly gone out, and there was nothing now to indicate the way, but the mare made no mistake. Preference gave her horse its head and followed in hot pursuit.

Both soon alighted before the door of the barn behind the house where, to the girls' joy, they found the forest-faced Indians apparently awaiting them.

Alice was a spirit in a fainting condition, but Preference was more self-possessed. She merely told the Indians that they had but their way, and asked her maid-servant to guide them out of the valley to where the trail to Frederic's farm began. Such was the unexpected ending of their journey.

## CHAPTER XI

### CANINE VAGARITY

The last stage of the girls' journey—the ride home from the ranch—was like some horrible nightmare. It was as though recollection had suddenly turned itself into a hideous, tangible form which was pursuing them over the dark expanse of prairie. Even their horses seemed to share something of their riders' fears, for their light springing stride never slackened during that ten mile stretch, and they had to be literally forced down to a walk to give them the necessary "breathing." Like their riders, the animals' one idea seemed to be to reach the security of the farm with all possible dispatch.

The farm dogs heralded their approach, and when the girls slid down from their saddles Hephzibah was at the threshold waiting for them. The rest of the evening was spent in recounting their adventures. Hephzibah listened to their narrative, filled with superstitious emotion whilst endeavouring to treat the matter in what she deemed a practical, common-sense manner. She was profoundly impressed. Harvey was there but chose to treat their story with uncompromising incredulity. So little was he interested, although he listened to what was said, as to rouse the indignation of both Alice, and only his sudden departure to bed saved a stormy ending to the scene.

It was not until the house was locked up, and Prudence and Alice were preparing to retire—they shared the same bedroom—that Hephzibah Malling dropped her mask of common-sense and laid bare the plaintively superstitious side of her character. The good farm wife had not lived on the prairie all her life without contracting to the full the superstitions which always come to those whose lives are

spent in such close communion with Nature. She could all the time with the two girls when no one else was present. She had heard a hundred times the legends pertaining to the lost valley of Outland, but this was the first time that she had heard the account of the changes from eye-witnesses.

She came into the girls' bedrooms arrayed in a red lace-trimmed gown, which had shrunk somewhat in the stress of many washings and hot nights, and was clinging tightly while so driven about, except that her head like a marmalade bun turned. She came with an air of importance and seated herself in a high-backed armchair. The Dr. Jones was brushing her hair as Alice was already in bed.

"Mrs. ——," she said, as the physician bent down; he was brushing them both, but her round eyes were turned upon Alice, who was sitting up in bed with her hands clasped about her knees. "I've been thinking that maybe we might ask young Mr. Ch. I. good out here. It is quite a time since I've seen him. He used to come frequent like before, before — with a sharp glance at her daughter — a few months back. He's a good lad and I think as he'd make out to a country girl. Heres. An' if he'd do em a deal of good to air them sun-burns. I'm sure they're melting in the mucky. What say?"

Alice blushed and the foolishness of her eyes twinkled with pleasure. Prudence answered at once.

"That's a good idea, my hen, I'll write to him at once for you." Then she turned her smiling face upon the old lady and stuck a fore-finger at her. "You're an arch-plottin' lady mother. Look at Alice's face. That's not sun-burn, I know."

"Maybe it is, maybe it isn't," replied Mrs. Malling, in a comfortable chair, whilst her fat face was turned up towards a generous wood-worked tent which hung directly over the head of the bed. "though I'll not say but what a day in the sun like she's just had might have reddened the skin some."

"I am very sun-burnt," said Alice somewhat.

"Why, we've been in the sun, where there's no sun, nearly all day," explained Prudence quickly.

"Ah, them furze. Them furze," observed Elephashall,

in a pensive tone of reflection. "Folks say strange things about them forests."

"Yes," put in Alice, "and to turn attention from herself—usually folks talk a lot of nonsense when they attribute supernatural things to certain places. But for once they're right, mother. He lay, I shall never disturbed in ghosts again. 'Oh the horror of it! it was awful,'" and the girl gave a shudder of genuine horror.

"And could you see the—ghosts?" asked the old lady in a tone of suppressed excitement.

"No, mother," chided in Prudence, leaving the dressing-table and settling herself on the polished coverlet of the bed. "They seemed quite solid."

"If they were living robes," said Alice.

"Did they now?" said Mrs. Nodding, laying her hand meaningfully. "But the love has it that spectres is flimsy things as ye can see through like the steam from under the lid of a steewpan."

"Yes—es," said Alice thoughtfully.

"All I can say is, that I w'nt to George Iredale's grave beside that graveyard. I tell you, mother, there's no arguing away what we saw. They came up out of one of their graves and marched in a procession into the ruined dead house," said Prudence seriously.

"And my mare nearly threw me in her fright," Alice's face had paled at the recollection.

Hephzibah nodded complacently. She was thoroughly enjoying herself.

"True—true. That's just how 'em. Animals has as instinct that ain't like to human. They sees us. Now maybe your horses just stood of a tremble, tremby like? That's how it mostly takes 'em."

Under any other circumstances the two girls would probably have laughed at the good lady's appreciation of the supposed facts. But their adventures were of too recent a date, however, thus cheered themselves. The gloom of the forest seemed to have got into their bones, and the horrid picture was still with them.

"The Haunted Hill," said Prudence merrily. "I don't think I ever heard in what way the story was haunted. Have you, mother?"

"Sakes alive, girl you. It's the way you have said

with fantastic fixin's added according to taste. That's how it come I never believed. folks disagreed about the spicin'. They all allowed as the place was haunted, but their notions wasn't just alike. Your poor father, child, was a man o' sense an' be argued as plain as a two-post. He said there was ful-mysteries around that valley 'cause of the varinating yams, and I wouldn't go near here. But as Sarah says, when the washing don't dry white there's mostly a prairie fire somewhere round. Your father was that set on his point that he wouldn't never go an' see for himself, although, I do say, I urged him to it for the sake of truth."

Prudence yawned significantly and Alice had snuggled down on to her pillow. The former clambered in beneath the clothes.

"Well, mother, all I can say is that never again, unless I am forced to, will I visit Owl Hollow. And under any circumstances I will never run the risk of getting benighted there."

"Well, well" said the farm-wife, rising heavily to her feet and preparing to depart. "maybe fur ye would like to hear about the thing you've seen when he comes back." She paused on her way to the door and turned an earnest face upon the two girls. "Say, children, you didn't see no blue lights, did ye?"

"No, mother Hepzhy," said Alice sleepily. "There were no blue lights."

"Ah" in a tone of relief. "There's no gunnawayin' the blue lights. They're bad. It means death, children, death, does the blue light - sure." And the good lady passed out of the room with the shuffling gait which a pair of loose, heelless slippers contrived to give her.

"Prue," said Alice when the door had closed, "what are you going to ask Holt to come?"

"As soon as possible, if you like."

"Thanks. Good night, dear; mother Hepzhy is a sweet old thing."

The two girls turned over, and in a few moments were dozing soundly. It would have taken more than the recollections of their adventures to banish sleep from their tired eyes. They slept the sweet, refreshing sleep of those who have passed their waking hours in the strong bracing air of the prairie.

Two days later Hervey was abroad early. He was cleaning his guns outside the back door of the house. Two weapons were lying upon a large dust sheet which was spread out upon the ground. The guns were in pieces and each portion had been carefully cleaned and wiped. He was now devoting his attention to a heavy revolver.

Prudence was standing in the kitchen doorway watching her brother. Andy was over by the barn, a pedigree dog, the dispatch of the teams to the harvest fields, the hands were preparing to depart to their work. Prudence's early morning work was in the creamery.

Hervey looked up from the weapon he was cleaning and turned his great eyes upon his sister.

"When is this fellow coming out here?" he asked in a tone of irritation. His question was merely the result of his own train of thought. He had not been speaking of any one in particular.

"Who? Robb Chillingwood?"

"Yes, of course. I've not heard of any one else's coming."

"We've asked him for a fortnight to-day. Why?"

Hervey ran the cleaning-rod through a couple of the chambers of the pistol before he spoke again. The rag jammed in the barrel and entailed a hard pull to extract it.

"Who asked him to come?" he went on, as he readjusted the piece of rag in the eye of the rod.

"Mother did. He's a very nice fellow," Prudence looked over at the parade of "shire" teams as they started for the fields. "Alice and he are engaged to be married, you know."

"And I suppose he's coming out here to 'spoon' her—ugh! It'sickening."

"Don't be so brutal," the girl replied sharply.

"Brutal?" Hervey laughed coarsely. "You're getting particular. The house won't be a fit place to live in with an engaged couple in it. I should have thought mother would have known better than to have asked him."

"Don't be absurd."

Prudence moved from her stand. The dog, Beebe, had slowly emerged from round the corner of the barn and was now marching leisurely towards her. She went over to meet him and caressed his great ugly head.

"I'm not absurd." Hervey followed her movements with no very friendly gaze. He hated with an unreason able hatred to see her go near the dog. "I know what engaged couples are. Look at the way some of the clowns around here carry on with their girls. When Mr. Hobbs Chillingwood takes up his abode here, I shall depart, I tell you straight. I think mother should have consulted me first. But, there, I suppose that little vision Aber arranged it all. I hate that chum of yours."

"There's nothing like mutual regard, whatever its quality," laughed Prudence, but there was a look of anger in her deep brown eyes. "You are at liberty to please yourself as to your friends or enemies—they make no difference to the work of the farm."

The girl's face was turned defiantly upon her brother. Hervey spun the chambers of the pistol round. His eyes remained upon the weapon, and his forefinger pressed steadily upon the trigger. He looked thoughtfully over the fore-sight and rested the pistol in the crook of his up-ruled, bent left arm. His attitude was one of taking steady aim. He made no reply.

Suddenly Prudence felt the bristling of Neche's mane under her hand. As I she sought to soothe him. This dog's display of suddenly temper were as unaccountable as they were fierce.

"What are you going to do to-day?" she asked, as her brother did not speak and the dog uttered.

"Going over to Iredale's place. Why?"

"When shall you return?"

"Don't know." Hervey turned, his pistol was pointing towards his sister.

"Well, what about the 'thresher'?" You and Andy were going to get it——Look out!"

Her exclamation came with a shriek. The great bucky had dashed from her side and made a charge towards its master. Its eyes were drawn up, and its foul, bared fangs gleamed in the morning light. Hervey lowered his weapon with a laugh. The dog paused instantaneously, with a wicked growl, it turned back and sought again the girl's caressing hand.

"One of these days I'll give you something to snarl at, you d——d cur," Hervey said between his clenched teeth.

Then he turned at the sound of his mother's voice. The old lady was standing in the kitchen doorway.

"What's all the fuss about?" she asked, turning her round eyes from one to the other. "Quarrelling again? I'll be bound. Breakfast's ready, so just come in, both of you or the 'star' jacks' 'll all be spoiled."

Prudence glanced covertly in the boy's direction as she served the summons. She was afraid that the brute would repeat a further attack upon its master. In spite of the constant bickerings which took place between these two, the girl had no desire that her brother should be hurt.

Hervey spoke not a word during the morning meal, except to demand the food he required, and his mother had a damping effect on those about him, and it was with a sigh of relief that his mother at last rose from the table and began to gather the plates preparatory to clearing away. Once, as Hervey moved slowly towards the door to return to his gun, she looked at the boy as though he were going to speak. But the words died in her lips and she scuttled off to the wash-house without saying a word.

The steaming breakfast was over. Hervey mounted his horse and rode off. His mother looked after him, sighed and shrugged, then she went on with her work with a touch of her old cheerful air never absent her. No complaint ever passed her lips, but to those who knew the kindly old face the change that had come over it was very apparent. The smooth forehead was creased with wrinkles which were new to it, and the eyes had lost something of their expression of placid content.

But Hervey traversed his own road at his own gait. His thoughts he kept to himself. The man was more or less inseparable to those about him.

To-day he had taken his dog with him. He had at length made up his mind to rid himself of the brute. The exhibition of that morning had decided him upon a course which he had long meditated, but had always failed to carry out when the critical moment arrived.

The hound limped along beside its master's horse as they plunged into the deep woods of the Owl Hole Valley. Nor did he show the least sign of a desire to wander from "Jock." He followed on the beaten track of old roads

keeping pace with the horse in spite of the fact of only possessing three legs.

Arrived at the ~~cross~~ ~~cross~~ Herry hopped over his fence to Chetoo and proceeded ~~on~~ the woods in front. To-day he had a far greater interest in the country. The valley beyond the Hamlet Hill had not done regularly by him, now he was interested in the hills on the south. Access to this region was afforded by the one other passable road from the valley, namely the Hamlet Hill, and then by leaving ~~the~~ ~~the~~ the right. He traversed the steep slopes of the hill and soon came upon the narrow wagon road which at some point had been hewn by the early settlers of the district.

Here he tramped along steadily, the bound limping at his heels. He walked slowly with the long legs out of joint, accustomed to running great distances. He gave little heed to his surroundings as far as the beauties of the place were concerned. He was not the man to regard Nature's handiwork in the light of artistic effects. The great running deer were never still, they moved swiftly from side to side, ever watching for the indication of game or for food or shelter. It seemed as though the sport was of the health ~~life~~ to him. Now and again he gave a short spur upon the bound behind him and so those running the place out to avoid the result of more violent and violent flight, and had nothing to do with the sportsman's trap. These which followed him used to do more in the alertness of the deer than in respect of the presence of game than is represented by the human being.

Almost without knowing the road, after rounding an almost hidden saddle, opened out on to the grassy and ~~the~~ ~~the~~ clearing. It was the first time in Herry's many wanderings in these regions that he had actually come upon this ~~the~~ ~~the~~ ~~the~~ little cemetery. For a moment he gazed upon it, he hardly realized what it was. Then as he noted the ruined but in the making the wooden railing broken and twisted about the place and the crooked and wavy leaning crosses and the ear-shaped walls of stone on ~~the~~ he marked the graves he remembered the voices of men he never had seen and his friend had told and advancing he leant upon one of the fence posts and looked about him curiously.

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The master's curiosity caused him to have a close watch and to be bound for the day's work, and it is natural that mind turned off with the day's work. His movements were but little, strength was lost. But though Heron's eyes were fatigued, the dog's not one, it was merely the result of the attraction of the one moving object within the range of his vision, and not with any purpose of his own. In fact it was but at first the master's movements observed and running to the watching hawk. The master stopped once and the dog started again, and at the instant a new object in the wolfish eyes beheld.

It stretched out its neck, spread out its great head and unfolded the projecting arms of its shoulder-blade. Then it drew back sharply in that little upward, graceful stretch with a motion of attention and eager expectancy. Then the great head was turned in the direction of its master, and its unblinking gaze was fixed upon his face. The animal stood thus with rare constancy, gazing, turning the neck, and that listening for any stir, any sound that might baffle upon the air. Then with a drowsy movement, as if possessed of all concealed energy, it turned away to continue its quiet, and its silent, watch.

The dog is shown of itself once again and for a moment is hanging towards the centre but the animal stepped on to the only path which was not overgrown with rose-  
bushes. The instant its foot touched the sandstone and its head went down which did not touch the ground.

Then followed a low sniff. The dog's great nose wrinkled up and down and a long snout wrinkled significantly upon the snout. Now Hervey's gaze instantly became one of keen interest. His thoughts no longer were divided, but were of the moment. He watched the movements of the hound with the predominant interest.

The dog moved a step or two forward. He uttered this as though it wished to make no mistake. The sniffing came short, quick and intense. Then the great nose wrinkled and the sniffing continued upon the nose. Now the nose turned in the direction of the hut, then it turned back to the opposite section of the path. Hervey remained in his place where he stood and his thoughts were laid with wondering speculation.

Slowly the dog started off down the path, away from the hut. There was something very like the death in its attitude. Not of that pause came the great emanation of a deathlike grave. It was the hound's rage now was displayed to the full. Its excitement was tense. The barking came more frequent and tense. The barking made a throb and which barks quivered in the night. That, in itself, with its low loud foot, like a roar at the start, had buried the stone with its huge low paws, as though it would tear up the whole grave and lay bare the underlying bones it contained.

Hervey encouraged the eager hound.

"There she is. Be quick, I am in no undertow."

The dog responded, making the earth tremble beneath its heavy paws. The sound of excitement but unillustrated led to the hound's and the man's great, even gloated triumph. It now moved from his position and started over to the grave. He stopped there and examined the place where the dog had been working. He poked his fingers down into the hollow which the vigorous claws had made. In instant he drew them back sharply with a face you could not escape from. It straightened himself up and pushed the dog roughly away from the spot.

"Come here, you cur," he snarled. "Come over to the hut."

The dog obeyed with reluctance, and Hervey had to keep a watch upon the hound a man to lead him to his

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eds. He half dragged him and half led him up the path until they neared the gate. Then with a ~~loud~~ the dog leapt forward and rushed in beneath the eaves of which covered the doorway, giving tongue to little yelps of impatience as he went.

Hervey was about to follow, but a strange sound beneath his feet attracted him and made him pause. He listened. The noise went on. It was very faint but quite distinct and very like the regular fall of a hammer. He started instantly to the dog. A stone head appeared from beneath the eaves but he allowed it no sign of disobedience. Instantly Hervey seized him by the mane, then pulled and tugged the stones and freed him self to be dragged from the building. Hervey did not relax his hold until he and the dog were a ill out of the place and were once more buried from view within the depths of the woods.

For a moment, when the hound regained his freedom, it stood still and turned its head back towards the place they had just left, but a threatening command from the man brought him to heel at once and there was no further barking. It was strange the relation which existed between the master and pet. There could be no doubt that Hervey hated the dog and the dog's regard for its master was of ~~dim~~ ~~slight~~ quality. As a rule it would have in a most servile manner, but its attitude the moment its master's voice was turned was always sneer and even treachery. Hervey had told his master that the dog was as treacherous as an Indian. But Hervey was not a ~~bad~~ master, or he would have added, "and as wicked as a rattlesnake."

The two tramped on all day, but there was little shooting done. Hervey also seemed to have utterly forgotten his intention to shoot the dog. This afternoon Jack had got up and dashed off into the woods, but there followed no report of the gun. Prairie chickens in the open glades whirred up from the long prairie grass, but Hervey paid no heed, and when several deer bounded across the ~~open~~ path, and the gun remained loaded under his arm, it plainly showed the non-combined state of his mind.

The truth was that Hervey was thinking with a profoundity that imposed something which must very nearly

afford his personal interests. And these personal interests, at the moment, were George Brown and the grave-yard. He had done well, for the story the girls had told him should have given him something which pertained to the supernatural. But now he had learned something which put an entirely different meaning to the adventures the two girls had related. It is easy enough to mystify the mind of human kind, but dogs' instincts are purely practical, and as Hetterley argued, ghosts do not leave a hot point. He had but little time to hot-mint. At first the man had been desirous to know what that point was. Grave-yards on the prairie are places frequented by the hungry coyote, and he had been inclined to believe that such was the trail which the dog had followed. But his own investigation had suggested something different.

The grave which the dog had selected so hurriedly was an ordinary grave, for in the song he had sung into the hole the dog had made at the edge he had found that beneath the stone was a casket. Then had come the remembrance of the first proceedings he had distinctly heard beneath the ground. And suddenly the story the girls had told him came back to his mind. Without hesitation he took his gun. He knew had not been species pertaining to prairie life frequented the mysterious grave-yard, but real live human beings. What, he asked himself, was the meaning of it? What strange impulsion was George Brown in the early days? Where was his old home? Where did he go to when he moved out of the district on business, and what was the nature of the business? To Hetterley it was a great step from questions of this sort to a general answer. And when he reviewed the situation, the secret which divides the innumerable parts of the district to cattle raising and the great wealth of the other all made since his return to the country, it was no difficult task for the master to suggest some plausible undertaking. But the one question for which he could find no reasonable reply was that which asked the nature of the doings which seemed to go on at night in the shades of those dense forests.

He tramped on, freed from the pressing time. His diversions had reduced him to a pitch of excitement which stayed his thoughts in the direction they could naturally

mother. In what manner could he tell his discovery to her? His sense of prudence quickly suggested his idea. He need not always go to the house and the graveyard and if it was not the best and safest "concealed" dwelling upon which his task was engaged, the best would be over. As he wanted to move, and the owner of Loon's Ranch had plenty and to spare.

The sun was just now over the horizon when he at length turned his steps again in the direction of the ranch. He was hungry, he had eaten nothing since breakfast.

Hersey was not the man to be satisfied by any simple oath regard to the house, the wife, and the owner of Loon's Ranch. His portion of the ample dinner which Chantz had prepared for him without the shadow of even a retort had when it was finished left him the man smoking one of Iredale's best cigars with the greatest content. He watched the short, slow glow and decay. He waited until the last vest of the smoke had charge of his lungs to the indeterminate shadow which flitted in the wake of the daylight, and the spark of flame as it flared out upon its surface. Then he called for his horse and set out ostensibly for Loon Dyke.

He rode away down the valley until he was clear of the woods, then leaving the prairie trail he turned to the right and descending a wide, rocky, broken draw plunged into the woods again taking a course which carried him apparently parallel to the course of the stream. Now he quickened his pace and turned suddenly, looking back only at his horse's head had difficulty in keeping up with him. Nor did he draw rein until he reached the point where his horse which backed the graveyard hill. There however he dismounted, and caused his horse to a tree. Then he removed the reins from his horse's bridle and proceeded to secure the beast in an adroit position. The night had quite closed in and the darkness of the woods was profound when he started to make his way up the side of the hill in the direction of the graveyard.

Hersey passed for nothing. His mind was already made up. Whatever weakness may have been his there was none to be found in his act and now. He was afraid of how the possibility of furthering his own interests, and he revelled in the thought of leaving Iredale a wealthy

The desperate methods he was adopting troubled him a great deal. I had to pay dearly if he was to be satisfied with the nature of crime.

He was extremely fond of friendship for any one. The  
strength of his was his ruling passion. He cared nothing  
from whence it was derived, or by what means. If things  
were as he believed them to be, there was there a truly  
golden opportunity. And he would bleed Treacle to the  
extreme limits of his resources.

He reached the outskirts of the clearing, but he did not leave the shadow of the forest. The black trees screened him from a half-glimpse from which he could obtain a perfect view of the lonely enclosure. The tumbling hut and the nearby trees were with their remaining leaves to show up in the starlight. And he settled himself for a long vigil.

An hour passed without rest. It was weary work that waiting. He dared not move about for at every movement of his feet upon the road the rattling vegetation cracked and creaked like iron in the profound heat of silence. The man's patience, however, was long enduring under such circumstances. He told himself that the result would more than repay him for the trouble. He had everything to gain and the task appealed to him. Two hours passed away still. It seemed to be the awful silence. Then came the first sign. Suddenly a bright light shone out down in the valley in the direction where he had a house stand. It gleamed forth almost red in its depth of yellow. Heron held his breath so deep was his excitement and the feeling of interest on

The sudden appearance of the light was the signal for further demolition work. The prolonged speech of an owl rendered to it. The scratch, in the sand and cat purring gave the cat her such a nerve-tickling moment as to almost urge him to leap a half a foot. But the owl fled away and as the claws grew fainter and eventually became silent he recovered himself. A moment passed and another cry up in the sky, at the time I came from out on the back of the granite ledge. Harvey stood without a stir. He had detected something curious in the sound of those voices. Then as the owl left a wayward mewed muffled below his breath rasped his discovery.

"Human!" he said to himself, and a feeling of unholy fear crept over him, and he drew a pistol from his pocket and a hand grappled its barrel.

His eyes were still turned in the direction of the house, where the light was burning when a scraping noise suddenly drew his attention to the graveyard before him. The scraping sound is odd, and sounded like the grinding of an axe upon a whetstone. It distinctly came from one of the graves, and for a moment, he experienced a shudder of superstitious fear. The next moment he suppressed a chuckle as he realized that the sound came from the grave at the side of which he had made such a demonstration that morning. He gazed in the direction his great eyes burning with the mad fire of pent-up excitement and speculation. What was the secret he was about to learn? He longed to draw closer to the spot, but he knew that he dared not move.

Suddenly a vague shadow loomed up from amongst the grass which grew so rankly in the cemetery. Up sprang a rose, black even against the back, round of utter darkness in which the forest was buried. Hervey leaped forward but even straining and eyes were tense drew. What was this—thing?

The shadow paused. Then it rose higher. It seemed to suddenly straighten up, and Hervey permitted a deep breath to escape him. The black thing was but some sort the shape of a man, and the form moved forward towards the big dead house. Then the waiting man saw that other figures were following the first in rapid succession. Each figure was bearing its load. Some seemed to be carrying bundles, some carried that which appeared to be a box, and others carried small square packages. As Hervey's eyes became used to the gloom, he saw he was able to distinguish something of the movements of these denizens of the grave. He noted the long, dark, monk-shaped garment each figure wore, and, after a while, to the starlight he was able to note that most of them wore on their heads little skull-caps. Then a short, red exclamation broke from his lips, and in his tone was a world of satisfaction.

"I know!" he whispered. Then "Traffic in yellow, by all that's holy!"

## CHAPTER XII

### THE BREAKING OF THE STORM

THE next morning at Lonesome Ranch was quieted before the table in his pretentious sitting room. Before him were piled a number of open account books, and books containing matters relating to the business of his ranch.

He was not looking at them now, but sat gazing at the blank wall in front of him with thoughtful, introspective eyes. His chin was resting upon his clenched hands, and his elbows were propped upon the table. He was sitting with his shirt-sleeves rolled up above his elbows, for the day was hot and the air was close and heavy. On one hand the window was wide open, but no jarring sound came in to disturb the thinker. The door on the other side was also open wide. George Iredale showed no desire for secrecy. His attitude was that of a man who feels himself to be perfectly safeguarded against any sort of surprise. Thus he sat in the quiet of the oppressive heat thinking of many things which chiefly concerned his life in the valley of Owl Hoot.

He had been going over the accounts which represented his fifteen years of labour in that quiet corner of the great Dominion, and the perusal had given him a world of satisfaction. Fifteen years ago he had first settled in the valley. He had acquired the land for a mere song for no one would look at the region of Owl Hoot as a district suitable either for stock raising or for the cultivation of grain. But he had seen possibilities in the place—possibilities which had since been realized over beyond his expectations. His sense of humour was tickled as he thought of the cattle he had first brought to the ranch—a herd of old cows which he had picked up cheap somewhere out West at the foot of the Rockies.

He almost laughed aloud as he thought of the way in which he had fostered and added to the wild stupid legends of the place, and how he had never failed to urge the undesirability of his neighbourhood for any sort of agriculture. And thus for fifteen years he had kept the surrounding country clear of its positive settlers. Life had been very pleasant, quiet, and notorious, and profitable for him, and as he thought of it all, his eyes drooped again to his books before him, and he gazed upon a sea of entries in a long, thick, narrow volume which bore on the cover the legend—

#### OPIUM

Yes, he never attempted to disguise from himself the nature of his calling. He plastered nothing but his trade with thick coatings of white wash. He knew what he was, and faced the offensive task with perfect equanimity. He was a smuggler, probably the largest operator in the illicit traffic of opium smuggling, and the most successful importer of Chinese along the whole extent of the American border. He knew that the penitentiary was yearning for him, and he knew that every moment of his life was shadowed by the threat of penal servitude. And in the meantime he was storing up his wealth, not in driblets, dependent upon the seasons for their extent, but in huge sums which were proportionate to the risks he was prepared to run.

And his risks had been many, and his escapes narrow and frequent. But he had hitherto evaded the law, and now the time had come when he intended to throw it all up—in blot out at one sweep the traces of those full of prosperous years, and settle down to enjoy the proceeds of his toil.

It was only after much thought and after months of deliberation that he had arrived at this decision. For this man revelled in his calling with an enthusiasm which was worthy of an honest object. He was not a man whose natural inclinations leaned to any law-breaking, far from it. Outside of his trade he lived a cleaner life than many a so-called law-abiding citizen. The risks he ran, the excitement of contraband trade had a fatal fascination which was as the breath of life to him, a

lament on which, with all his strength of mind in every  
effort to free us from his power, he did all he could to  
overcome us; and the fascinations of the drug  
he parleyed.

If he were to stand face to face with a contingency he had never taken into consideration. He had failed a certain man a great deal, a woman, and he had been forced to a close choice in the two things. Rather he would run over all the odds of Prudence Malling or he would marry Barbara. It from all his old associations. To a man of Irreducible disposition the two things were incompatible. The steady growth of his love for that girl a love which almost had that was best in his deep, strong nature, and now, Charybdis in the balance, and, reluctantly though the name of Lovely Flanch was to sweet him if from the house which had afforded him so much health in so many years of real living moments, his decision had to be made with calm deliberation, the hat had got to the door with the trade in yellow world know him no more.

He rose from his seat and entering the room stood gazing out of the open window. Finally his eyes were turned up towards the heavy banking of storm-clouds which hovered low over the valley.

Already the greater portion of his plane had been carefully laid. They had been early for many reasons. The agents were soon to be required to be dealt with literally. However, everything had been satisfactorily settled. Now only remained the disposal of the ranch. This was rather a delicate matter for obvious reasons. He wished to effectually obfuscate all traces of the traffic he had carried on there.

He went back to the table and picked up an official-looking letter. It was a communication from Robbie Langwood, written on the municipal note paper of Ainsley.

He read the letter and fly through.

"**MY DEAR MR. TREDALY,**

"There is a man named Gordon D. Field staying at the hotel here who has lately arrived from Scotland. I have effected the sale of the Dominy Ranch—run

knew, the German Greg's, old place to him. He is a man of considerable means, and is going in largely for stock raising. He has commissured me to buy a fine string like five thousand head of cows and two year old steers for him. The bulls he brought out with him. You will understand the difficulty I shall have in obtaining such a bunch of suitable animals, and I thought you might have some surplus stock that you wish to dispose of at a reasonable price. You might let me know by return if such is the case, always bearing in mind when you make your quotations that the gentleman deals from old Scotia. There is shortly to be a great boom in emigration from both the old country and the States, and I am now combining the business of land agent with my other duties, and I find it a paying concern. Let me know about the cattle at your earliest convenience.

"Yours truly,

"Ross Crichtonwood."

Tredale smiled as he read the letter over.

"Comes at an opportune moment," he said to himself. "Surplus stock, eh? Well, I think I can offer him all the stock he needs at a price which will meet with the approval of even a ready boot. I'll write him at once."

He seated himself at his table and wrote a long letter asking Chingwood to come out and see him, and at the same time, offering to dispose of the stock of Lonesome Ranch. He sealed the letter, and then retrieved his account books to their hiding place behind the bookcase. Then he went to the door and summoned his head man.

In spite of the habit of years, Tredale was not without a strong sense of relief as he reviewed the progress of the disestablishment of the ranch. He remembered how narrowly he had escaped from Leslie Grey less than a year ago, and now that he had begun to burn his boats he was eager to get through with the process.

The ferrari faced Chintz framed himself in the doorway.

"My horse!" demanded his master. "And Chintz, I want you to take this letter to Lakeville and post it with your own hands. You understand?"

The little man nodded his head.

"Good!" Tredale paused thoughtfully. "Chintz,"

"We went out a little later. " we've finished with opium. We take it privately" he from time out, you and I. We are going to leave Out-Of-It. How does that suit you?"

The little man chattered on, and twisted his face into a squatting grimace intended for a pleasant smile. Then his *yes/no* went up suspiciously. Indale took his meaning at once.

"I don't know where we are going as yet. But you'll go with me. I want you to remain my head man."

Chintu nodded. There could be no doubt from his expression that he was devoted to his master.

"Right. Send my horse round at once. I am going to Looch Dihle and shall be back for supper."

The man departed and the rancher prepared for his ride.

When he left Indale set out for Looch Dihle the sun was still in the gloom of coming storm. But he knew the particularities of the climate too well to be alarmed. The storm he judged would not break until nearly sundown, and then it would only be short and sharp. In the meantime he would have reached the farm. There was a certain unconquerable quality in his way of getting his affairs. It was as though some strange power was driving him to haste. This may have been the result of the man's character, for he was of a steely rigour of nature. He had put the necessity in motion, and now he pressed it with the ardour of eager desire to see the work swiftly carried out.

As his horse galloped over the prairie, he took the direct route of the crow's flight, his thoughts centred upon the object of his visit. He saw nothing of the pleasant fields and pastures through which his journey took him. The threat of coming storm was nothing to him. For all he had to do the sky might have been of a truculent blue. The ruffing prairie chickens rose early in their season, with their crops well filled with the gleanings of the harvested wheat fields, but he scarcely even saw them. All he saw was the sweet, dark face of the girl to whom he intended to put the question which would most love to hear, whether it be put by the man of their choice or by some one for whom they care not a cent. He had always longed for this day to come, but, until now, had never seen how such could ever dawn.

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for him. It had been a secret wish to sever himself from the past, but his desire once born in his heart was filled with that of rest, and never had he felt so free from care as now. He realized all that a lover may realize of his own unworthiness, but he allowed himself no extravagance of thought in this direction. Prudence was a good woman he knew, and he intended, if fate so willed, to devote the rest of his life to her happiness. As he drew near to his destination his heart beat a shade faster and his legs began to tremble. He found himself speeding up on his charges of success. He believed that the daughter of Hepzibah Mering regarded him with favor, but nothing had gone before to give him any clue to her maiden feelings. He wondered doubtfully and in proportion, his nervousness increased.

But up on the trail, at a distance, he saw a horseman riding away from the farm, he did not care trouble about the rider's identity. The strong, reckless nature concealed beneath his quiet exterior, urged him on to learn his fate. Nothing mattered to him now but his sentence as pronounced by the chisel of the prairie whose love he sought.

There were three occupants of the sitting room at the farm. Prudence and Alice Gordon were at the table, which was covered by a litter of twisted dress material and paper patterns. Prudence was struggling with a mass of skirt folds, under which a sewing machine was almost buried. Alice was cutting and pinning and basting seams at the other end of the table. Sarah Gurnidge was standing beside the open window watching the rising of the storm.

Conversation came spontaneously. The girls were intent upon their work.

"It's all very well to have new dresses," said Prudence with an impatient tug at the material on which the machine was jerking, "but I'm afraid half the pleasure of them is absorbed by the process of 'making'. Oh, these endless seams! And I don't believe a single one of them is straight. I feel quite hopeless."

"Cheer up, Prue," said Alice, without looking up. She herself was endeavouring to set a wristband pattern upon a piece of stuff so that she could get the two bands out of barely enough cloth for one. "You should see

more dash when working a machine. When you are turning it, imagine you are driving a 'through mail' to the west and have to make up time. The seams will come all right."

"Yes, and break cotton and needles, and—and haul the engine over the side of a cut bank, or run down a gang of slate layers or something. There now, I've run clean off the cloth. I wish you wouldn't talk so much."

The two girls laughed whilst they joined efforts in righting the catastrophe.

"Isn't it getting dark?" said Alice, when Prudence had once more settled to work.

Sarah spoke without turning from the window.

"The storm's banking, child. The lightning is already flashing over Owl Bluff way. Hervey will only just escape it."

"What did he want to go over to the ranch for?" asked Prudence. "He never seems to go anywhere else now. I should think Mr. Tredale will get sick of having him always round."

"My dear," observed Sarah, withunction, "when two men enjoy destroying the harmless life which the good God has set upon the prairie, they never tire of one another's society. He is who would disdain to black a pair of boots would not hesitate to crawl about in the mud and damp reeds of a swamp at daybreak to slaughter a few and eat ducks. There is a bond amongst sportsmen which is stronger than all the vows made at any altar. Hervey's delight in destroying life is almost inhuman. I trust he never shoots sitting game."

"I should hope not," said Prudence. "I would never own him as a brother if he did. Hello, Neeche," as the door was pushed slowly open and the great husky limped heavily into the room. The animal looked round him in a dignified, unblinking way, and then came over to Prudence's side and leisurely curled himself up on the skirt of her dress. "Nay, old boy," she added, looking down at the remissful form, "if mother comes in and finds you here you'll leave the room hurriedly."

Alice laid her scissors down and looked over at her friend.

"Hervey seems quieter than ever lately. He won't even take the trouble to quarrel."

"And a good thing too," said Prudence shortly.

Sarah turned and surveyed the two girls for a moment an amused expression was in her dreamy eyes. Then she turned back to the window as the first distant growl of the coming storm made itself heard.

"Hervey only quarrels when his mind is in a state of stagnation. The mind of a man is very like a pool of water. Let it stand, and it corrodes with matter which throws off offensive odours. The longer it stands the worse state it gets into. Set the water in motion, turn it into a rushing stream, and it at once cleanses itself. Hervey's mind has been lately set in motion. I have noticed the change."

"He has certainly become less offensive of late," said Alice. "I wonder what has changed him."

"Food for mental occupation," said Sarah.

"A life monotonous, unrelieved, breeds certain discontent,  
Deadening a mind to lofty thoughts too weak by nature mount."

Prudence brought the machine to a standstill, and propping one elbow upon the table rested her chin upon her hand.

"I believe you are right, Aunt Sarah," she said slowly. "Hervey's certainly found something which has set him thinking. I rather fancy I know—or can guess—what it is that has roused him."

The old lady turned from the window and gazed curiously at her pupil. She was keenly interested. The recreation of her life was the observation of her kind. Her logic and philosophy may not always have been sound, but she never failed to arrive somewhere in the region of the truth. The recent change in Hervey had puzzled her.

"He asked me yesterday to let him see that notice in the *Free Press* which appeared when Leslie was murdered," Prudence went on. "He also asked me what Leslie's dying words were. He insisted on the exact words."

"The storm will break soon," observed Sarah. She had turned away to the window.

"I wonder," said Alice; "perhaps he has discovered—?" She broke off meaningfully.

"That's what I think," said Prudence.

Sarah shook her head, but what she meant to convey was uncertain, for she had her back turned and she said nothing at the moment. Prudence restarted her machine and Alice reluctantly bent over her patterns. Sarah moved back from the window. She saw a horseman galloping over the prairie in the direction of the house. She had recognized Iredale.

"Girls," she said, her soft eyes turning on Prudence's bent head, "I really think some one should be helping the mother. This is baking day." Prudence looked up with an expression of consternation. "No, no, not you, child. You stay here and get on with your fandangles and dressmaking. I'll go and help her."

Without waiting for a reply she darted off. She had no intention of having her innocent little scheme upset. The moment after her departure the clatter of horse's hoofs came in through the open window. Alice, looking up, saw Iredale dismounting from his horse. She jumped up to go to the front door.

"Here's Mr. Iredale!" she exclaimed. Then, "So he's returned home. I'm so glad. One scarcely knows the place without him."

She dashed out to meet him, and, a moment later, returned ushering him in.

"Mr. George Iredale," she announced, with mock ceremony. Then she stood aside to allow him to pass, bowing low as he entered the room. She stood for a moment gazing upon the burly figure. She noted how the plain feet were lit up at the sight of the girl bending over the sewing-machine. Then she gave herself an obvious cue.

"I'll go and call another Hepziby," she said, and retreated hastily to the back-house.

Iredale moved over to where Prudence was sitting. She had ceased work to greet him, but she did not rise from the table. He he surveyed the intruder, grunted and closed his eyes again. Prudence was half inclined to resent Alice's sudden departure. Alice was in her confidence, she knew her feelings as regarded George Iredale. She considered her friend's action was unkind.

"You mustn't let me disturb you, Prudence," Iredale said in his low, pleasant voice. "What is this"—fingered the new material—"a new fall dress? Wonderful how

you can cope with the intricacies of the manufacture of such things. It would be a very sorry day for us if I were left to cut my own trails." He laughed merrily.

Prudence detected an unusual lightness in his voice, and something warned her that this man had come over that afternoon to see her alone. She joined in the laugh, but her eyes remained quite serious.

"When did you come back from town?" she asked, after a pause.

"I haven't been to town. I've been across the border. My bunnies took me into Minnesota."

"Oh, I thought you had been to Winnipeg." She stamped and caressed the great dog at her feet.

Freddie shook his head. "A vision" of the storm that across the open window, and a crash of thunder followed it immediately. The storm was breaking fast.

"I'll close the window." Freddie ran across the room to do so. Prudence looked after him. When he returned he sat himself in Alice's chair, having brought it nearer to the machine. Then fanned a long while while the machine rattled down a seam. The man watched the needle's fingers, gently as they guided the material under the needle. The bent head pre-occupied him more than the barest outline of the girl's cheek, but he seemed content. Now that the moment had arrived for him to speak, he was quite master of himself.

"Prudence," he began at last, "I am giving up my ranch. I have been making the necessary arrangements I have done with money being."

"Really?" The girl looked up sharply, then down again at her work. She had encountered the steady gaze of the man's earnest eyes. "Are you going to leave me?" She was conscious of the lameness of her question.

"I don't quite know. That depends largely upon circumstances. I am certainly about to seek pleasant places, but I cannot tell yet where those pleasant places will be found. Perhaps you will help me."

"How?" The seam swerved out into a great bow, and Prudence was forced to go back over it.

"Easily enough, if you will."

The girl did not answer, but buried herself with the manipulation of her machine. Her face had paled, and

her heart was thumping in great palpitations. Fredrik went on. He had assumed his characteristic composure. What fire burned beneath his calm exterior, it could have needed the too-raging eyes of Sarah to judge to detect, for beyond the occasional flitting of his pale grey eyes, there was little or no outward sign.

"I have known you for a good many years, child, years which have helped to put a few grey hairs on my head, it is true, but still years which have taught me something which I never dreamed of learning but here on the prairie. They have taught me that a charming as lover exists for every man on this earth, and that somewhere in this world, there is a woman who can inspire him with feelings which make the pettinesses of his own wifery - at once seem very small indeed. I have learned that man was not made to live alone, but that a certain sort of mate has a few whom of that I can utterly understand. I have learned that there is but one woman in the world who can be to me to the better. I have expectations of man, and that woman is - you, Prudence."

The girl had ceased to weep and was staring straight in front of her out of the window, where the wind at times was now flinging irresistibly. As Fredrik pronounced the last words she shook her head slowly - almost helplessly. The man had leaned forward in his chair, and his elbows rested on his parted knees, and his hands were tightly clasped.

"Don't shun your head, dear," he went on, with paternose reverence. "It is the out first, and then you shall give me your decision. I know I am much older than you, but surely that disparity need not stand in our way. I dare say I have many more years of life yet left than lots of younger men. Besides, I am rich - very rich. With me you can have the life you choose. If you wish to stay here on the prairie, why, you shall have the most perfect farm that money can buy. If, on the other hand, you choose to see the world, you only have to leave the world. In short, I know I am not a very attractive man. I have little to recommend me, and my life has not always been spent as perhaps it should have been. But I love you very dearly, and my future shall be devoted to your happiness. Will you be my wife?"

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There was a deafening crash of thunder which seemed to come from directly overhead. The dog started up with a growl. Then he stood looking up into the girl's face. The dying reverberations slowly faded away and left the room in deathly silence. The girl's gaze in the girl's eyes was unswerved by the dead set of her mouth. She kept her face studiously turned from Tredeale who, observing with all the intuition of a man in deadly earnest, read in her expression something of what his answer was to be.

"Can you not—do you not care for me sufficiently?"

The words contained such a world of appeal that Prudence felt herself forced to turn in his direction. She now looked squarely into his eyes, nor was there the faintest suspicion of embarrassment in her manner. The moment it had come when she must choose between herself and her self-imposed duty. She knew that she loved Tredeale, but she reckoned somethin', which sounded very like a sigh. She had listened to the principles of Sarah Lourridge all her life and in consequence she had learned to regard her duty before all things. She now unconsciously she had a great duty to perform. She felt helpless, so feeble in the matter, but the voice of conscience held her to her mistaken course.

"I believe I love you, I am sure I care for you very much, but—"

"Then you will marry me?" The man reached out to take her hand but she drew it back. His eager eyes shone in the stormy darkness in which the room was bathed.

She shook her head.

"When Leslie Grey was murdered I made a vow that I would not rest until the murderer was brought to justice. My vow is unfulfilled. I could not marry you and be happy while this is so. Do you know what marriage with you would mean? Surely that I should make no effort to fulfil my vow to the dead. I cannot marry you now."

Tredeale was staggered by the woeful wrong blindness under which he considered she was labouring. For a moment he could scarcely find words to express himself.

"But—but surely child, you are not going to let this phantom of duty come between us?" "Oh, you can never

do such a thing! Besides, we would work together; we would not leave a stone unturned to discover the wretch who did him to death——"

He broke off. Prudence answered swiftly, and the set of her face seemed to grow harder as she felt the difficulty of abiding by her resolve.

"There is no phantom of duty, George. It is very much a reality. I cannot marry you until—until——"

Irvale was smiling now. The shock of the girl's strange decision had passed. He saw something of the motive underlying it. Her sense of duty seemed to have warped her judgment, and, with quiet firmness, he meant to set it aside.

"And this is the only reason for refusing me?" he asked. He had become serious again, but he seemed merely to be seeking assurance.

"Yes. Oh, George, can't you see how it is?" She gazed appealingly into his face. And the man had to keep a very tight hold upon his feelings.

"I am afraid I am a little dense, child," he said gravely.

"I must make you understand," Prudence went on with nervous haste. Her conscience urged her forward, whilst her love prompted her to set aside all recollection of the dead and to back in the love this man offered her. She was a simple, womanly soul, trying with all the strength of her honest purpose to resist the dictates of her love, and to do that which seemed right in her own eyes. The task she had set herself had seemed easy when she had spoken of it to Alice, but now in the face of this man's love, in the face of her own self-realization, it seemed beyond her strength. Listen to me, and you will see for yourself that I must not marry you yet. I believed that I loved Leslie Grey truly, fondly. As I look back now I am sure I did. I was never happy but when I was with him. He seemed so strong and resolute. I never had a moment in which to doubt myself. Then, when he died, the agony I suffered was something too dire. I'd to contemplate. As he lay on the little bed with his life at wily ebbing, and I watched him dying before me, I was filled with such horror and despair that I thought surely I should go mad. Then it dawned

on me that he had been murdered, and my anguish turned to a dreadful feeling of rage and longing to avenge him. Never in my life did I experience such terrible passion as at that moment. I believe at the time I really was mad. The one thought in my mind was, 'Who - who has done this thing?' Then Leslie died and in his death again he awoke and told me, as well as his poor gasping faculties could tell me what had happened. His words were unintelligible to every one except me. And those words form a clue to the assassin's identity. By his bedside I swore to avenge him. Never would I rest until my oath was carried out. As you know, after that I became ill and went away. And, oh, the shame of it, during those months of rest and illness I forgot Leslie Grey. I forgot my vow. I forgot everything that claimed my duty. Think but the shame, the shallowness, the heartlessness, the futility - stars which are mine. I, who had loved him as I believed no girl had ever loved, had forgotten him as though he had never come into my life."

Trotter nodded comprehension, and as the girl paused "Then you came to me?" Prendeville went on. Her face was turned to me, but the light was now out of it, of which she saw the tongues of lightning playing across the sky. "Time went on and my remorse crept into my heart which made me feel my shortcomings. Gradually my conduct was revealed to me in the true colors, and I saw myself as I really was - a heartless, worthless creature, so despisable, even to myself, as to make me shudder when I contemplated the future. Let me be honest now, at least. I knew that I loved you, George, that is," bitterly - as far as I was capable of love - but what sort of affection was mine to give to anybody? I could not trust myself. I despised myself. My conscience cried out. I was a knave! But still remained. My vow was still fulfilled. Knowing this, how could I believe in this new love which had come to me? No, I could not. And it was the - that I saw what I must do. Before I could ever dream of love I must redeem the pledge I made at Leslie's deathbed. That alone could restore my faith in myself. I know that it is almost impossible to convey to you all that I

have thought upon the matter, but, believe me, I can never marry while I have a burden unavenged.

Travis stood in the girl's eyes as she bared up her cutaneous twisted self-accusation. And the sincerity of her words was not to be doubted for a moment. Irredale had listened wondering, and he marvelled to himself at the new form of perspective in a woman's mind.

"And you are prepared to undertake the matter alone?"

"Mother is helping me - it costs money."

"Just so. But would not a man's help be of greater importance than your mother's? Don't you think that your husband's assistance might help you far more? That it could be able to lighten the burden of this self-imposed silence? If it, but, could - because of your vow it should not deter you from marriage, especially when your husband is not only ready but most willing to assist you in clearing up the mystery, and ever young Leslie Gervy. As regards the quality - with a quiet smile - "of your regard, well, come you love me little girl, on your own confession, and if you have no greater scruples than you have off hand, then you must marry me."

Irredale went forward and took the girl's two hands in his. This time she made no resistance. She allowed them to rest in his broad palms, and, in spite of all her protests, felt ineffably happy.

At last she drew them away and shook her head weakly.

"No, it is no good, George. You must not be burdened with my undertaking. I cannot consent to such a thing. It is only your generosity and kindness which make you look at the matter so lightly. You would regret your decision later on, and then - No, mother and I will see the matter through. We have already secured the services of the smartest detective in Winnipeg, and he is working upon the only clue we possess."

"But I insist," said Irredale with a smile which made his plain features almost handsome. "And Prue, I am going to tell your mother that you have engaged yourself to me, now that I am a new recruit, fortune as well as the work. No - holding up his hand as the girl was about to protest again - "no objections, sweetheart. And, before we go further, tell me of that clue."

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Prudence and it happily. She had done her duty, she had laid bare her heart to this man. She had spared herself in no way. She had set him free, she told herself, the sort of girl she was. He still cared for her, he still wished to marry her. She bowed her head to his quiet question.

"It is not much to go upon, but as Deane, that is the detective, says, it is a decided clue."

She rose from her seat and walked over to a small work-table. At that instant the house shook to its very foundations with a dreadful crash of thunder. Berthe, who had moved with her, leapt hurriedly at the window as though flying at some terrible le creature. The girl called him to her side, then she stood trembling. Flash after flash of lightning blazed in the heavens, and she covered her eyes with her hands, whilst the thunder seemed as though it would rend the earth from end to end. Irredale was at her side in an instant, and his arm was about her, and he drew her head up to his shoulder. Instantly her nerve was restored, and as the noise passed she quietly released herself. Then stooping she opened the drawer of the table and pulled out a torn copy of the *Winnipeg Free Press*. She laid out the paper and pointed to the personal column.

"See," she said, with her index finger upon the second line of the column. "A new buturing stamp in Grey. Those who are responsible for that message, whatever it may mean, are also responsible for Leslie's death."

Irredale's eyes were fixed with a terrible fascination upon the print. A breath escaped him which sounded almost like a groan. His hands clenched at his sides, and he stood like one turned into stone.

"How—how do you know that?" he asked, in a hoarse, hoarse voice.

"Leslie said so with his last dying breath."

There came no answering word to the girl's statement. Irredale did not move. His eyes were still upon the paper. The silence of death reigned in the room. Even the storm seemed suddenly to have ceased, only was there the incessant swish of the torrential rain outside.

"That is the clue poor Leslie gave me."

"Ah!"

"What do you think?"

"You must give me time to think."

Iredale's mouth was parched. His voice sounded strange in his own ears for the moment he could scarcely realize his position. An overwhelming horror was upon him. Suddenly he turned.

"What is the date of that paper?"

"A few days before Leslie's death. But this notice has appeared many times since—which will make our task the easier."

"Yes, it will make our task the easier."

Another pause, which was protracted until the silence could almost be felt. Then Prudence spoke.

"You will stay to tea?"

Iredale pulled himself together.

"No. I think not. The storm has passed, the rain is ceasing. I had better hurry back home. It will come back on us—the storm, I mean."

The girl looked out of the window.

"Yes, I think it will. Oh, I forgot to tell you Hervey went over to see you this afternoon."

Iredale's eyes turned sharply upon the girl.

"Ah, yes, I will go at once. I will call to-morrow and see Mrs. Balling. Good-bye."

He turned away and abruptly left the room. Prudence looked after him. She saw him pass out, she saw him go out by the front door and hurry down the little path which bisected the front garden. She saw him go round to the stables and he seemed not to heed the rain which was still falling lightly. But it was not until she saw him riding away down the trail that she realized the suddenness of his departure and the fact that he hadn't even attempted to kiss her.

Iredale's horse received little consideration at its master's hands on that homeward journey. The animal was ridden almost at racing pace over the long ten miles of country. And all the way home the words the girl had spoken were running in his ears with maddening insistence—

"And when we find the author of those words we find his murderer."

She had virtually accused him of murder. For he alone was the author of those words in the paper. Truly his sins were finding him out.

## CHAPTER XIII

### BLACKWALL

As Hervey entered the valley of the ranch he listened for the warning owl cries. To-day, however there were none. He smiled to himself as he noted the fact, for he knew their origin, he knew their object. He well recollect that these cries were the alarm of sentries stationed at certain points to warn those at the ranch of the approach of strangers. He knew, too, that they were used as signals for other things. And he admired the ingenuity of Iredale in thus turning the natural features of the valley to his own uses. Rain was beginning to fall in great drops, and the thunder of the rising storm had already made itself heard. He urged his horse forward.

Few men can embark on a mission of hazard or roguery without some feelings of trepidation. And Hervey was no exception to the rule. He experienced a feeling of pleasurable excitement and anticipation. There was sufficient uncertainty in his mission to make him think hard and review his powers of attack with great regard for detail. There must be no loop-hole of escape for his victim.

On the whole he was well satisfied. But he was not unprepared for failure. During his acquaintance with Iredale he had learned that the master of Lonely Ranch was not easily trifled with, neither was he the man to accept a tight situation without making a hot fight for it. It was just these things which gave Hervey the gentle qualms of excitement as he meditated upon the object of his journey. He thought of the large sums of money he had borrowed from this man, and the ease with which they had been obtained. He remembered the kindly ways and gentle manner of this reserved man, and somehow he could not get away from the thought of the velvet gloves.

But even as he thought of it he laughed. There was no getting away from the facts he possessed and if it came to anything in the shape of physical resistance well he was not unprepared. There was a comfortable feeling about the heavy joist of the six-chambered "lawyer" in his pocket.

The valley seemed much more lonely than usual. The hoarse barking of the watchful sentries would almost have been welcome to him. The forest was so dark and still. Even the falling raindrops and the deep rolling thunder had no power to give the place any suggestion of life. There was a mournful tone over everything that caused the rider to glance about him furtively, and wish for a gleam of the prairie sunlight.

At length he drew up at the house. There was no one about. A few cattle were calmly grazing in the corral. There was not even the sharp bark of a dog to announce his arrival. As Hervey drew up he looked to see Fredale come to the door for he knew the rancher had returned from his sea farings, but the front door remained shut and although the window of the sitting-room was wide open, there was no sign of any occupant within the room. He dismounted and stood thinking for a moment. Then he raised his voice and called to Chintz.

His summons was repeated before the man's ferret face appeared round a corner of the building. The little fellow advanced with no show of alacrity. Fredale had told him nothing about any expected visitor. He was not quite sure what to do.

By dint of many questions and replies, which took the form of nods and shaks of the head on the part of Chintz, Hervey learnt that Fredale had gone over to Loop Dyke, but that he would be back to supper.

"Then I'll wait for him" he said decidedly. "You can take my horse. I'll go inside."

The head man took the horse reluctantly and Hervey passed into the house.

For a long time he stood at the open window watching the storm. How it raged over the valley! The rain came down in one steady, hissing deluge, and the hills echoed and re-echoed with the crashing thunder. The

Blinding lightning shot athwart the lowering sky till the nerves of the watcher fairly jangled at each successive flash. And he realized what a blessing the lightning rain was in that world of remorse & torture. What might have been the consequences had the storm preceded the rain? Hardened as he was to such things, even Hervey shuddered to think.

Wild as was the mirth, the waiting man's thoughts were in keeping with his surroundings, for more relentless than could not well have been Fredale's money bags should surely be opened for him that night before he returned home. He would levy a heavy toll for his silence.

The great dark eyes, so indicative of the unrestrained nature which was his, burned with deep, cruel fire as he gazed out upon the scene. There was a profoundness, a capacity for bellishness to their expression which scarcely belonged to a sanely balanced mind. It was inconceivable that he could be of the same flesh and blood as his sister, and yet there was no doubt about it. Perhaps some unusually sagacious observer would have been less hard to convince. Hervey was bad, bad all through. Prudence was good. Swayed by emotion the girl might have displayed some strange hidden, unsuspected passionate depths, as witness her feelings at her dying lover's bedside. Her rage at the moment when she realized that he had been murdered was indescribable. The hysterical sweep of passion which had moved her at that moment had been capable of tragic impulse, the consequences of which one could hardly have estimated. But her nature was thoroughly good. Under some sudden stress of emotion, which for the moment upset the balance of reason, a faint resemblance to the brother might be obtained. But while Hervey's motives would be bad, hers would have for their primary cause a purpose based upon righteousness. The man needed no incentive to sway his dispositions. He had let go his hold upon the saving rock, now he floated willingly upon the tide of his evil disposition. He preferred the broad road to Hell to the narrow path of Righteousness. It may not always have been so.

The storm abated with the suddenness of its kind.

During Hervey's long wait Chints did not leave him entirely alone. Several times, on some trivial pretext, the little man visited the sitting-room. And his object was plainly to keep an eye upon his master's unbidden guest. At last there came a clatter of galloping boots splashing through the underlay of the forest, and presently Irredale pulled up at the door.

Hervey watched the man with chagrin. And his survey was in the nature of taking the man's moral measure. He looked at the familiar features which he had come to know so well—the easy, confident movements which usually characterized Irredale; the steady glance, the quiet undisturbed expression of his strong face. The watching man saw nothing unusual in his appearance, nothing to give him any clue, but Hervey was not a keen observer. Only the most apparent change would have been seen by him, the subtler vibrations of a disturbed mind were beyond his ken. Irredale seemed to be merely the Irredale he knew, and as he watched his lips parted with a sucking sound such as the gourmand might make in contemplating a succulent dish.

Irredale came in. Hervey met him at the door of the sitting room, and his greeting was cordial, even effusive.

"How are you, sir? I knew you were to be back to-day. Jolly glad you've returned. Quite missed you, you know. It doovt what a storm. What?"

"A bit; nothing to speak of. They told me at the farm you were over here."

Irredale looked quickly round the room. His survey was not lost upon his visitor. Then he went on—

"Chints looked after you? Had any refreshment? Whisky?"

"Chints looked after me! He looked in every now and then to see what I was doing." Hervey laughed unreasonably. "Yes, I can do with a gentle 'four fingers' thanks."

Irredale produced a decanter and glasses and a carafe of water. Then he excused himself while he went to change his clothes. While he was gone Hervey helped himself to a liberal measure of the spirit. He felt that it would be beneficial just then. His host a unconcerned

manner was a little disconcerting. The rancher seemed much harder to tackle when he was present.

Presently Tredale returned, and, seating himself in a deck chair, produced a pipe, and pushed his tobacco-jar over to his visitor. He was wondering what Hervey had come over for. He had no wish for his company just then. He had hoped to spend this evening alone. His mind was still in a state of feverish turmoil. However, he decided that he would get rid of the man as quickly as the laws of hospitality would allow.

A silence fell whilst the rancher waited to hear the object of the visit. The other refused to smoke, but Tredale lit his pipe and smoked solemnly. His face was, if possible, more serious than usual. His eyes kept half-closed. Hervey cast about in his mind for the opening of his attack. He seated himself on the edge of the table and looked out of the window. He raised his eyes to the leaden sky, then he withdrew his gaze and looked upon the floor. He swung one leg to and fro, as he leant sideways, and supported his attitude with a hand resting upon the table. At length, as the silence continued and Tredale presently raised his eyes and stared straight at him, he turned to the doctor and helped himself to another drink. Then he set his glass down with a heavy hand.

"Good task, that," he asserted. "By the bye, where have all your owls departed to? Are they like the ducks, merely come, pause, and proceed on their migratory way? Or perhaps—" with a leer—"they only stand on sentry in the valley when—when you require them to."

Tredale permitted the suspicion of a smile. But there was no gaiety in it, on the contrary it was the movement of his facial muscles alone. Hervey had touched upon delicate ground.

"Did they not welcome you with their muted exclamation?" he asked, removing his pipe from his lips, and gently pressing the ash down into the bowl with his finger-tip.

The other grinned significantly. He had plunged, and now he felt that things were about. Dimly, the spirit had warmed him.

"That's a real good game you play, George, old man. The imitation is excellent. I was deceived entirely by it. It was only the other night that I learned that those fearful screech owls were human. Most ingenious on our part. You are well served."

Iredale never moved. He smoked quite calmly. His legs were crossed and the smile still remained about his mouth. Only his eyes changed their expression, but this was lost upon Hervey, for they were half closed.

"I don't think I quite understand. Will you explain?" The rancher spoke very deliberately, his voice was well modulated but cold.

Hervey laughed boisterously to cover a slight nervousness. This attitude of Iredale's was embarrassing. He had anticipated something different.

"Is there any need of explanation?" he asked, when his forced hilarity had abruptly terminated. "The only thing which puzzles me is that you've kept it up so long without being discovered."

There was a long pause. Then Iredale removed his pipe from his mouth, knocked it out upon the heel of his boot, and returned it to his pocket. Then he rose from his seat and stood squarely before the other.

"Don't let us beat about the bush," he said. "I think plain speaking is best—in some cases. Now, what have you to say?"

Hervey shrugged his shoulders. His dark eyes avoided the other's gaze, the steely flash in Iredale's grey eyes was hard to confront.

"A good deal," he said, with raucous intonation. "The smuggling of Chinese and consequently opium is a profitable trade. There's room for more than one in it."

"Go on."

Iredale's tone was icy.

"Of course I am not the man to blow a gulf like this. There's too much money in it, especially when worked on extensive lines, and when one is possessed of such an ideal spot as this from which to operate. That was a positive stroke of genius of yours in selecting the graveyard as a hiding place. I suppose now that place is honeycombed with cellars for the storage of—of—

yellow. Must be, from the number of 'yellow-devils' I ~~saw~~ come out of the grave the other night. My, but you're slick, Tredale; slick as paint I admire you immensely. Who'd have thought of such a thing? I tell you what, you were never intended for anything but defending the law, George, my boy. We could do a lot together. I suppose you aren't looking for a partner?"

Tredale's face wore an almost genial expression as he replied. The rancher's tones were so cordial that Hervey congratulated himself upon the manner in which he had approached the subject.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I wasn't," he said. "As a matter of fact, you must have seen me despatching my last cargo of yellow. Why? Were you thinking of starting in the business?"

"That is my intention."

"Is it?"

"Yes, it is." Hervey's tone was emphatic, and his attitude trueulent.

"Ah! are you prepared to buy this place?" Tredale went on. "I can easily hand you over my connection."

"Buy?" Hervey thought this man was dense. "Why, I haven't two cents to my name to buy anything with. No, I don't think there will be any buying and selling between us, George Tredale."

"Then what do you propose? We may as well come to a definite arrangement."

The rancher's tone was peculiar.

"We'll run this thing for all it's worth. Hang to it as long as there's a cent to be made."

Hervey helped himself to more whisky. His self-satisfaction was immense. He had not thought that Tredale would have been so easy to handle.

"Um. A very nice, comfortable arrangement—for you," Tredale moistened his lips slowly. "You'll sup the juice while I squeeze the orange for you. No, friend Hervey, I'm not dealing."

"But you must!"

"Must?"

"Yes, don't be a fool. It means more money to you, and I shall share in the profits."

"If I wanted to make more money I could continue

in the business alone. I am not here to make money for you."

Iredale stared straight into the face before him. His grey eyes seemed to pierce through and through his companion. Hervey moved from his position. Iredale's attitude was coldly uncompromising.

"Then you refuse my offer?"

"Most emphatically."

Hervey was inclined to show his teeth. However, he checked the impulse and spoke in a conciliating tone.

"There is another alternative. Your fortune is very large. I want fifty thousand dollars."

Iredale's face relaxed into a genuine smile.

"Your demands are too modest," he said ironically. "Anything else?"

The other's eyes looked dangerous. The lurid depths were beginning to glow.

"The money I am going to have before I leave here to-night."

"Ah! blackmail. I thought so."

Iredale's contempt was biting.

"Call it what you like, Mr. George Iredale. I tell you this, you are in my power and you will have to buy my silence. You like plain speaking; and now you've got it. Refuse compliance, and I leave here to expose you."

"Pooh," said Iredale, leisurely turning to the window. "Do you think I'm a babe? How are you going to prove your charge? Why, you must be the veriest simpleton to think I am unprepared. By the time you can bring the law about me there will not remain a trace of —my work. You can never bring your charge home."

"Ah, you think not," Hervey's words sounded like a snarl. The whisky he had drunk had worked him to a proper pitch. He had not done yet. His next shot was to be a long one and a bold one, and he was not sure where it would hit. He was not sure that it might not rebound and hit his own nature which makes for success or disaster without a second thought. For him there was no middle course. His temperament was volcanic and his actions were largely governed by the passionate nature which was his. Iredale had not

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turned from the window, as he might have seen the evil working of that face. His own great broad shoulders were set squarely before Hervey's gaze, and the words promising all that only added fuel to the latter's already superheated feelings. "Perhaps you might find it interesting to know that they are hot upon the trail of the man who shot Leslie Grey."

Iredale swung round like a flash. "Now were the storm clouds which but now frowned in the heavens more black than the expression of his face.

"You miserable bounder!" he cried, his eyes sparkling and his jaw muscles fairly quivering with the force of his clutching teeth. "What hellish crime would you attempt to fix on me now?"

Hervey grained with all the ferocity of a tiger.

"I wish to fix no crime on you. I merely mention a fact. Leslie Grey was the only accuser of him in life. He stated before he died that the man who inserted the notice in the paper which ran, 'I know knowin' - stamp in Grey,' was the man who murdered him. I suppose you don't happen to know who was responsible for that enigmatical line? You did not inspire it?"

The look that accompanied the man's words was fiendish. The great eyes shone with a savage light. They expressed a hatred which no words could describe. Iredale's hands clenched and unclenched. His fingers seemed as though they were clutching at something which they hoped to tear to atoms, and his thoughts centred upon the man before him.

Once that day he had braced that challenge. Once uttered in all unconventionality of its sign language, but now with hideous meaning. His powers of self-restraint were great, but he had reached their limit. This man had accused him of a dastardly murder. Suddenly his voice rang out through the room like the bellow of a maddened bull. His great figure quivered with the fury of his passion. Hervey had done his worst, now he shrank before the storm he had provoked.

"Out of my house, you scum!" Iredale roared. "God! but if you stay here an instant longer, I'll smash you as I would a house."

The rancher stood panting at the door. His flushed

eyes never left the face of the man before him. Hervey moved; he hesitated. The grin had left his face and a look of dread had replaced it. Then he moved on, forgetful of all but his moral and physical fear of the commanding figure of enraged manhood that seemed to tower over him. He even forgot the weapon which lay concealed in his pocket. He slunk on out of the door amidst a profound silence, out into the soft twilight of the valley.

The door stood open; the window stood open. Iredale looked after him. He watched the tall, drooping figure; then, as Hervey passed from view, Iredale turned back and flung himself into his chair, and his laugh sounded through the stillness of the room.

But there was no mirth in that laugh. It was like the hysterical laugh of a man whose nerves are strained to breaking tension.

He knew he had made a terrible mistake. His rage had placed a deadly weapon in his enemy's hands. He had practically admitted his authorship of the notice in the *Winnipeg* paper. What would be the result? he asked himself. Again that strained laugh sounded through the room.

As Hervey rode away from the valley his fear of George Iredale fell from him as might a cloak. His face wore full expression of the evil in his heart.

He, too, laughed; but his laugh was an expression of triumph.

"You're less clever than I thought, George Iredale," he muttered. "You would have done better to have bought my silence. Now I can sell my discovery elsewhere. Money I want, and money I mean to have."

But he spurred his horse on as an anxious thought came to him.

## CHAPTER XIV

### A STAR IN THE DARK

MRS. MALLING fumbled her glasses out of her pocket and adjusted them on her nose. She had paused in her work to receive her letters, which had just been brought from Lakeville. The girls stood by waiting to learn the news.

The summer kitchen was stifling hot. The great cook-stove, throwing off a fearful heat, helped to heighten the brilliancy of the farm-wife's complexion, and brought beads of perspiration out upon her forehead. Prudence and Alice looked cool beside "Mother Hepzhy," but then they were never allowed to do any work in the kitchen. Mrs. Malling loved her kitchen better than any part of the house. She had always reigned supreme there, and as long as she could work such would always be the case.

Now she was preparing the midday meal for the threshing gang which was at work in the fields. Great blocked tin canteens stood about upon the floor waiting to receive the hot food which was to be sent down to the workers. Hepzibah was a woman of generous instincts where the inner man was concerned. The wages she paid were always board wages, but no hired man was ever allowed to work for her and pay for his keep. She invariably insisted that every labourer should be fed from her kitchen, and she took care that his food was the best she could provide.

"Alice, girl," the old lady said, as she tore open the first letter, "go and see if Andy is hutching-up yet. Tell him that the dinner boxes will be ready in quarter-hour. Maybe you'll find him in the bean patch. I sent him to gather a peck o' broad beans. Who's this from?" she went on, turning to the last page of her letter to look at

the signature. "Hm—Winnipeg—the bank. Guess I'll read that later."

Also ran off to find Andy, and Mrs. Malling picked up another envelope.

"Prudence, my girl," went on the farm wife, as soon as Alice's bark was turned, "just open that other," pointing to a blue envelope. "The postmark reads Ainsley. I take it, it's from young Hobbs Clifflingwood. Maybe it's to say as he'll be along directly."

Prudence picked the last letter up.

"It is hot in here, mother, I wonder you can stand it." Her mother looked up over her spectacles.

"Stand? chud? It's a woman's place, in the kitchen I can't trust no one at the stove but myself. I've done it for over forty summers, an' I don't reckon to give it up now. This is from that place feller. He ain't doing much I'm thinking. Seems to me he spends most of his time in making up his lists of expenses. Howsum, you look into it. What's Master Hobbs say?"

She put her glasses back into their broad old fashioned case and turned back to the stove. She could never allow anything to keep her long from her cooking. She lifted a lid and stabbed her cooking fork prudily into a great boiler full of potatoes. Then she passed round to the other side and shook up the fire.

"Oh, what a shame, mother! Won't Al be disappointed! Hobbs can't come out here, at least not to stay." Prudence had finished her letter and now looked disapprovingly over at her mother.

"And how be that?" asked the old lady, standing with a shovel of anthracite coal poised in her hand.

"He says that the rush of emigrants to the district keeps him at work from daylight to dark. It's too bad. Poor old Al!"

Mrs. Malling dumped the coal into the stove with a clatter and replaced the circular iron top. She said nothing, and Prudence went on.

"He's coming out this way on business shortly, and will call over here if possible. But he can't stay. Says he's making money now, and is writing to Al and giving her all particulars. I am sorry he can't come."

"Well, well, maybe it's for the best," said her mother,

in a consolatory manner. "Seemingly his coming would only cause bickerings with Hervey, and, good sakes, we get enough of that now. I'm not one for underhand drablings, but I'm thinking it would be for the best not to say anything to your brother about his coming at all. If he asks, just say he can't come to stop. I'd sooner keep Hervey under my eye. If he gives off as he used, you never know what mischief he'll be getting up to. He just goes into Winnipeg and gets around with them, and swags and—and you never know. I have heard tell though he never lets on, as he's too fond o' poker. Leastways, I do know as he spends more money than is good for him. Sarah and me was talking only the other day. Sarah's pert, you see, and she declares that he's got gammin' went in his lines. Maybe it's so. I'll not dispute. He won't have no excuse for less o' now." And she sighed heavily and took up the vegetation from the stove.

Alice returned, and the sound of wheels outside told the farm-wife that the buckboard was ready for the men's dinner.

The two girls and the old lady portioned out the food into the great canteens, and Andy lifted them on to the buckboard. Then the charman drove away.

By the time the farm dinner was ready Alice had quite got over her disappointment. Prudence had told her the contents of the letter, and also her mother's wishes on the subject. Alice was naturally too cheerful to think much of the matter, besides, she was glad that Hubb's business was improving.

Hervey came up from the fields in Andy's buckboard. He always came home for his dinner, and to-day he brought an atmosphere of unvoiced cheerfulness with him. He had spent much thought and consideration upon his relations with George Fredale, and the result of his reflections was displayed in his manner when he returned from the fields. Never in his life had he held such a handful of trumpery. His hand needed little playing and the chances of a criss-cross looked to him remote.

After the meal he went out to the barn, where he smoked for awhile in penitent solitude. He thought long and earnestly, and was so absorbed that he looked up

with a start at the sound of his mother's voice calling to him from the open kitchen window.

"Heast yourself, Hervey boy. There's work to be done down in the fields which is your share in the day's doings."

And the man, removing the pipe from his mouth, forgot to grumble back a rough retort, and answered quite cheerfully—

"All right, mother. Is Prudence there?"

"Where about she be, if not?" replied his mother, turning back from the window to tell his sister that she was wanted.

Prudence came out. Hervey watched her as she approached. He could not but admit to himself the prettiness of her trim figure, the quiet sedateness of her beautiful, yet the face. Gazing intently he failed to observe the faint shadow in the expression of her soft brown eyes. There was no sympathy in his nature and without sympathy it would have been impossible to read the expression. But Prudence was feeling a little sad and a little hurt. In idle but not idle his pleasure two days had passed since he had told her that he loved her and had asked her to be his wife. Not since then had he been over to the farm, nor had she heard a word from him. Fortunately she told herself, she had said nothing of what had passed between them, not even to her friend Alice, that she was spared the sympathy of her friends. She had waited for his coming with a world of eager delight in her heart, and each moment of the day on which he was to have come to see her mother had been one of unalloyed happiness to her. Then as the evening drew on she became anxious. And again as night came, and still no sign from him, her anxiety had given place to alarm. That night she slept little, but she kept her trouble to herself. Alice was all eagerness to ask questions of her friend, but Prudence gave her no opportunity. The next morning a note had arrived. I am sending for him, but he won't be over at the earliest possible moment. And now the third day was well advanced and he still remained away. She did not doubt him, but she felt him and a little cold at the thought of his all winging himself to be detained by business. Surely his first duty

was to her. It was not like him, she told herself, and she felt very unhappy.

Hervey gazed her with an assumption of kindness almost affection.

"Are you very poor? I mean, I want to have a little talk with you. I've been working in your interests lately. You may guess in what direction. And I have made a strange discovery. We have not hit off very well, I know, but you must forgive me my short-sightedness. I have lived too long in the world to be a peasant companion. Can you spare me a few minutes?"

The dark eyes of the man were as gentle as their expression, and in the girl's present state of mind his apparent benevolence had a strong effect upon her. She was surprised, but she averted her eyes from his face with a world of gratitude. In spite of all, her love for her brother was very deeply rooted. The stupor of her nature and the life she lived made her an easy victim to his influence.

"Why, yes, Hervey; as long as you like."

"Good. I'm going down to the threshing. Will you walk some part of the way with me? Mother has just reminded me that my work must not be neglected. Another two days and we shall be ready for the fall ploughing."

The sun was pouring down with fervid intensity. The yard was very still and quiet. Everything that had leisure was resting drearily in the trifling shade obtainable. The swine had ceased to make themselves heard and were sleeping upon each other's shoulders. The fowls were scratching with ruffled feathers in the sun-dried soil of the parched earth, which they had made during the hours of morning energy. The pigeons had departed for the day to the shelter of a distant hill. Even the few horses remaining within the barn were dozing. The dog Necho alone seemed restless. He seemed to share with his master the stony passions of a cruel heart, for with infinite duplicity, he was lying low, pretending to be occupied with a great beef shin bone, while his red eyes watched intently the movements of half a dozen weary milk-cows, which were vainly endeavouring to reach the shelter of their sheds. But the dog could not have it.

With a refinement of torture he would allow them to ride slowly towards their yard, then, just as they were about to enter, he would fly into a dreadful passion and, barking like a raven at their heels, would chase them out upon the path, and then return once more to his bone, only to wait his opportunity of repeating the operation.

Hervey and Prudence moved away and passed down the trail. Neddy reluctantly left his bone, having satisfied himself in a comprehensive survey that no nameless interloper was about who could steal his treasure during his absence, and followed them. He walked beside the girl without any sign of pleasure. He was a dog that seemed to find no joy in his master's or mistress's company. He seemed to have no affection in him, and lived a life of mute protest.

Hervey did not speak for a few minutes. It was Prudence who broke the silence.

"I suppose it is nothing to do with Lele's death that you want to talk to me about. I wondered what your object was when you quested me so closely upon his dying words. Have you discovered a fresh clue?"

"Something more than a fresh clue." Hervey had relapsed into his old moroseness.

"Ah!" The girl's face lit with an almost painful eagerness. For a moment her own imminent troubles were forgotten. A wild feeling surged up in her heart which set the blood tingling in her veins, and she waited almost breathlessly for her brother's next words.

Hervey displayed no haste. Rather he seemed as though he would gain time.

"That message or advertisement in the paper. Did you ever attempt to fathom its meaning? It was some thing of a puzzle."

It all came up at the dark face beside her. Hervey was looking down upon the dusty trail. His look was one of profound thought. In reality he was calmed along certain lines.

"I tried, but fruitlessly. To me it conveyed nothing beyond the fact that its author shot Leslie."

"Just so. But before I tell you what I have discovered you must understand the argument. That line contained a message, a message so significant that once read with

understanding the mystery of Grey's death became one that a child might solve."

"Yes, yes, not the reading of it," Prudence exclaimed impatiently.

"It is intelligible to me."

"And—"

It was a different girl to the one we have hitherto seen—she treated the man's next words. The old, gratifying smile, the patient even disposition had given place to a world of anguish of the spirit. There was a look in these usually soft brown eyes which bore a strange resemblance to her brother's. A moment had arrived in her life when circumstances showed that other sides of her character, of which, perhaps, even she had been ignorant. She learned now of her own capacity for hatred and revenge. Some preliminary warning of how it might proceed had been given when Grey had died, but the moment had passed without full realization. Now she felt the inthrusts, signs of a curse. I passed it back to it which seemed to rest from somewhere in her heart and creep over her faculties, locking her in an envelope in which she felt her good motives and love being crushed out of all recognition. There could be no doubt as to the resemblance between these two people in that one touch of nature. It may was a long time in answering. He had not only to tell her of his discovery, but there were his personal interests to consider. He wished to assure himself of his own advantage.

"See here, Prue, what are you offering, or rather, is another offering to that detective? hap if he discovers the murderer of Grey? Let us, I understand one another. I don't intend to part with my discovery for nothing. I want money as badly as anybody can want it. For a consideration I'll tell you and pass to you who succeeded your man. Provided, of course, the consideration is sufficiently large. Otherwise I see nothing."

For a moment Prudence looked up from beneath her own brows into her brother's face. The glow in her look was gathering. She had long since learned the selfish nature of this man, but she had not realized the full depths to which he had sunk until now. He would sell his infor-

motion. And the thought scorched her brain with its dreadful significance.

"How much is it to buy you?" she asked at last. And words fail to express the contempt she conveyed in her tone.

Hervey laughed in a hollow fashion.

"You don't put it nicely," he said. "Ah, how much will buy me?" he added thoughtfully.

"When a man chooses the methods of Judas it seems to me there need be no picking or choosing of words. What do you want? How much?"

The answer came swift. He spoke eagerly and his tone was quite different from that which his companion was used to. It was as if some deep note in his more obscure nature had been struck, and was now making itself heard above the raucous jangling of discord by which his life was torn. The words were almost passionate, and there was a ring of truth in them which was astonishing coming from such a man.

"Look here, Prue. I want to get away from here. I want to get out upon the world again, alone, to make my life what I choose. I can't stand this place, the quiet, quiet surroundings, the people with whom I come in contact. It isn't living, it's existence, and a hellish one at that. Look around, prima - nothing but prairie. In the winter snow and prairie snow, in the summer the brown, scorching prairie. The round of unrelieved, monotonous labour, farming, can mind of man conceive a life more deadly? No, not! I want to get away from it all. Back to the life to which I was my own master, unfeletered by duties and distasteful labours for which I am responsible to others. From the beginning my life has been a failure. But that was not, really my fault. I worked hard and my ideas were sound and good. Then I met with misfortune. My life was my own to make of that after that - what I chose to do with it was my own concern. But here I do not live. I want the means to get away, to make a fresh start in different surroundings. Sooner or later I must go, or I shall become a raving maniac. You can help me in this, even as I can help you in the cause in which you are now spending and wasting a lot of money. Get mother to give me fifteen thousand dollars, not only as the price

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of my information but also to help me, as your brother, to make another start. I am not wanted here, neither do I want to remain."

He ceased speaking. The truth had died out of his tone when he mentioned the money, and his words were the specious wheedling of one who knows the genesis & kindness of those with whom he is dealing. But Prudence gave no heed to anything but that which found an answering chord in the passionate emotion which awoke Hervey's appeal to get away drew from her some slight proportion of sympathetic understanding, but her main feeling was a desire to learn the truth which he had discovered.

"Yes, yes; but the clue—discovery."

"First, the money. Next, you must show me that you will do this thing for me."

"I can only swear for myself. I can promise nothing in mother's name."

"Yes, but for yourself. You have an interest in the farm."

"Yes, I will give you all I have—all—all—if you can prove to me, and in a court of law, who was the man who shot Leslie Grey. I have saved nearly everything I have made out of creamery. It is not as large a sum as you require, but I can raise the rest from mother. You shall have all you ask if you can tell me this thing. But bear this in mind, Hervey, you will have to prove your words. I give you my word of honour that the money will be forthcoming when you have accomplished this thing."

Prudence spoke earnestly. But there was caution in what she said. She did not trust her brother. And though she was ready to pay almost anything for the accomplishment of her purpose, she was not going to allow herself to be tricked.

Hervey didn't like these stipulations. He had calculated to extort a price for his information only. The proving of his charge was a matter which would entail time and trouble and something else which he did not care to contemplate; besides, he wanted to get away. The recollection of his recent interview with Irredale was still with him. And he remembered well the rancher's attitude. It struck him that George Irredale would fight hard to prove his innocence. He wondered uncomfortably if

he could establish it. No, he must make a better bargain than the girl offered.

"See here, Prue, this is a matter of business. There is no sentiment in it as far as I am concerned. You conditions are too hard. You pay me half the money down when I give you the story. You can pay the rest when I have carried out your other conditions. It is only fair. Establishing a case in the law courts is a thing that takes time. And, besides, I have known guilty people to get off before now. I can convince you of the truth of the case. A jury is different."

Prudence thought for a moment. They were already within sight of the threshing-field. The drawing of the ox-hire, and the jerky spluttering of the traction engine sounded pleasantly in the sultry atmosphere. The dog hobbled lazily at her heels, nor did he show the least sign of anger at his surroundings. The wagons loaded with corn, &c. &c. were drawing up to the threshing-field in all directions, whilst those already emptied were departing for fresh supplies. Everywhere was a wondrous peace; only in those two hearts was an ocean of unrest.

"Very well. If you can convince me, it shall be as you say. You shall have the money. The rest shall remain until after the jury's verdict. I am not prepared to give you the money I have saved for any tale you choose to concoct. Now let me have your story. You have shown me too much of your world-craving to make me a ready listener."

"You will believe me before I have finished, Prue," the man retorted with a bitter laugh. "You will find corroborative for what I have to tell in your own knowledge of certain facts."

"So much the better for you. Go on."

In spite of her caustic words Prudence waited with impatience to begin and with rapidly beating heart for her brother's story. She did not know herself. She did not understand the feelings which swayed her. Hervey had an easier task than either of them believed. Of late she had dwelt upon the matter so intently, upon the matter under discussion that she was ready to believe almost anything which offered a solution to the ghastly mystery. But she did not know this. Hervey told his story with all the

turning of a man who appreciates the results which attach to the effects of his words. He left no detail which could further his ends.

"Grey, on his deathbed, alluded to the police in the paper. He did so in answer to your question as to who had shot him?"

"Yes."

"He was perfectly conscious?"

"Yes."

"So it is true before he died you and he had discussed this matter, and he told you he was negotiating a coup in which that officer had afforded him his potential clue." The girl nodded, and Hervey went on. "Grey was a Customs officer. All his work centred round contraband. No other was carried into his sphere of operations. Very well, the clue which that officer afforded had to do with some illicit traffic. The question is, What was the nature of that traffic? Here is the obvious solution. 'Yellow-bounding.' What traffic is known by such a title as 'Yellow' in this country? There is only one. Traffic in Chinese! The smuggling of Chinese across the border. And this traffic was booming. Operations were being successfully carried out. Where? The rest is easy. Somewhere in Grey's district. 'Slump in Grey' could very easily infer the circumstances, that Grey's supervision was so lax, that the work was carried out in spite of him. You know everybody knows that Chinese are smuggled into Canada at many points along the border, and that opium is brought in at the same time. Thus the profits and the opium tax are avoided by men who make a living out of this traffic. The profit is worth the risk. There is a fact in this, big opium. The authorities are endeavouring to put it down. It is well known that nichts are swearing with houses for whom no poll tax has been paid. And yet the legitimate importation of opium does not increase. Rather has it decreased in consequence of the prohibitive tax imposed upon it. Still, these Chinese must have their opium. This then was the coup poor Grey meditated. He had discovered a hot bed of opium smuggling. If he succeeded in rounding the smugglers up, it meant a great deal to his future prospects. Is that all plain?"

"Yes, yes; go on."

The girl's eyes were gleaming strangely. She followed every word her brother said with an intentness which boded well for the result of the efforts. The awful array of arguments was speedily detailed. Now she waited for what was still to come without any attempt at concealing her impatience. For the time everything was forgotten while she learned of the murderer of her first love. The peaceful scene about her was set before eyes which no longer gazed with intelligence upon their surroundings. She was back in the farm parlour listening to Leslie's story of his hopes, his ambitions. Every detail of that evening was brought vividly back to her memory. She remembered, too, that that was the night on which Hervey had returned. There was a significance in the thought that was not lost upon her.

Hervey had come to a stand, and Prudence placed herself before him. Neebe squatted beside her, and as he sat his head reached up to her waist.

"Very well. The question at the remains, who along the border in this part of the country is smuggling Chinese? And having found your man, did he insert the notice in question?"

"Yes—and you—?"

"Chance pointed out the man to me. And I have ascertained the rest."

"And who is the murderer of Leslie?"

There was an unexpressive pause. Hervey gazed down into the eager upturned face. The dog beside the girl moved restlessly, and as he moved he made a curious whining noise. His nose was held high in the air, and his greenish eyes looked up towards the spotless sun-bonnet.

"The owner of Lonesome Ranch, George Iradale!"

Hervey turned abruptly away. Neebe had moved a little way back along the trail and stood looking about him. Then out on the still air rang a piercing hysterical laugh. And Prudence stretched out her arm and clutched at the barbed-wire fence-post as though her truth had overcome her.

Hervey looked sharply round upon her. Neebe gave a low growl, the noise seemed to have offended him; then he humped off down the trail back to the house.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE MAGGOT AT THE CORE

Hervey's look of surprise quickly changed to one of displeasure. To turn his sister's attitude merely suggested incredulity, nothing more.

"Well!" he said at last, as her laugh died out suddenly. Prudence turned upon him with a strange fierceness.

"Go on. You must tell me more than that to convince me. George Iredale—smuggler, murderer! You must be mad!"

Hervey kept himself well in hand. He was playing for a great stake. He would lose nothing through any ill-advised bluster.

"I was never more sane in my life," he answered coldly. "I am ready to prove my words."

"Prove them."

Prudence's face and the tone of her voice were icy. Her mouth was set firmly, the declined corners testifying to the hard setting of her jaws. She looked straight into her brother's face with an intentness which made him lower his eyes. He had no conception of the fire which he had stirred within her. One inexpressible desire swayed her. This man must tell her all he knew. Then she would refute every word, tell him what manner of man he was, and have him driven from the farm. She hated him at that moment as she might hate a rattlesnake. She was filled with a longing to strike him, her own brother, to the earth.

Hervey spoke in measured, even tones.

"You know the ranch and its surroundings well. You have been there. You have heard the so-called owl cries which greet the visitor upon entering the valley. Those are not owl cries at all, but the work of human sentries

always on the watch ready to give immediate alarm of the approach of danger. The secret of the ranch lies in the graveyard." Providence started. "That is where I made my first discovery, a discovery of which I should not have understood the significance but for your experiences when I was in that region two or three days before. At the time I speak of I had come upon the ranch to see the last time. I had Nick with me. I passed at the Leuben fence which surrounded it, and entered the graveyard gates. While I did so Nick mounted about thirty feet with canine impudent tones. Suddenly he became agitated and showed signs of having but upon a lost scent. I not had him curiously. He ran up a hill and then ran out of one of the stone marked plots. Then he began to test walk at the edge of it. I followed him and saw that he had dug a hole below the stone. I called him away and found that beneath the stone the grave was broken. Then I moved hasty away and taking the dog to the ruined dead house put him on the seat again. He dashed in, whining excitedly as he went. It was while I stood watching for his return that I discerned the most significant point. Directly under my feet somewhere under the ground I heard a sound of human being. Then I knew that the graveyard was no longer the resting place of the dead, but the abode of the living. Instantly I comprehended all the details of your ghost story and determined to witness for myself the scenes you had observed. Notice it for once and all in your mind. I was troubled with no impulsive fears upon the matter. I passed the truth." Hervey broke off but resumed quickly. "That evening I returned to the graveyard over a fence and took up a position in the dark shelter of the surrounding woods. See all you can. But the stated figures were not the ghosts which you thought them to be, they were Chinese carrying their boxes and bundles of personal luggage and I have no doubt a corps of spys. Then I understood that the graveyard was honeycombed with rooms and that this place formed the central depot of Leuben's traffic and his distributing station. I can understand how these 'yellowdogs' are distributed by means of loaded barrels and such things. The point I have not forgotten is the manner

by which the "goods" are brought into the country. I suggest the only reason I can think of as being almost without risk, and that is the lake."

Horsey paused to watch the effect of his story. Prudence gave no sign. She no longer looked at her com companion, but away across the harvested fields in the direction of Iredale's ranch. As he waited for her comment her lips moved.

"Go on" was all she said, and the man proceeded.

"It was an unmeaning expression which, in the first flush of discovery, I made use of which, I might have given me a clue to the rest. As realization of Iredale's doings came to me I thought of the notorious 'Traffic in Yellow.' That night I pondered long over the whole thing. I had learned to like Iredale better than any man I have ever known. He had always seemed such an honest, straightforward man. And all of you folks were so fond of him. It was a painful awakening but there was worse to come, for, as I lay awake thinking there flashed through my brain the recollection of what you had told me of Grey's death and his reference to the notice in the paper. Instantly the interpretation of that line came to me. It related to the yellow traffic. And I shuddered as I reviewed the possibilities which my discovery opened up. I couldn't rest. A feverish desire to know the worst assailed me. I questioned you as you may remember, and with every reply you gave me, my fears received confirmation. In the end I could no longer keep silent, and my anger drove me to a course which I have since almost regretted, for it has destroyed the last vestige of the regard I entertained for the man you have all so liked and respected. I went over to the ranch and challenged George Iredale——"

"On the night of the storm. The night he visited me 'Go on'—Prudence's face was ghastly in its pallor. She gave no other sign of emotion.

"Yes, on the night of the storm. I taxed him with smuggling. He admitted it. I taxed him with the authorship of that notice——"

"Well?" The girl leant forward in her eagerness.

"He did not contradict it. His attitude was a tacit admission. That is my evidence."

Hervey ceased speaking, and a long pause followed. The man waited. He did not wish to hurry her. He was not blind to the fact that she regarded Iredale with something more than mere friendly feeling, and, with fiendish cunning, he had played upon the knowledge by his allusions to his own regard for the man and the trust which they all placed in him. Thus woman's love for Iredale he knew would help him; for, gradually, as the damning evidence he had produced filtered through her armour of loyal affection, her hatred for the man would be doubled and trebled. In thus Hervey displayed a knowledge of human nature which one would scarcely have credited him with.

At last Prudence turned. The pallor of her face was unchanged. Only the look in her eyes had altered. The horror which had shone there had become a world of pitiful appeal. All her soul shone forth in those sweet, brown eyes. Surely it must have needed a heart of stone to resist her. Her body was leaning forward, her two brown hands were held out towards him.

"I don't believe it! I can't believe it! George is no murderer."

Hervey's great eyes lowered before that heartful look. His face was a study in hopelessness. From his expression of deep sorrow Iredale might have been his own brother who was accused of murder.

"I'm afraid there is no hope of what you say, Prue. Leslie was conscious, he knew what he was saying. Iredale had every reason for shooting him. The circumstantial evidence is damning. The most sceptical jury would be convinced."

"O God! O God! And he has asked me to be his wife." Prudence covered her face with her hands, and her bos' heaved with great, passionate sobs.

Hervey started at the words. His face lit up with a wicked joy. This was better than he had expected. George should pay dearly for his refusal to buy his silence.

"You say he dared to propose to you with that foul crime upon his soul? He is a worse villain than I had believed. By heavens, he shall swing for his crime! I had hoped that my news had come in time to save you

this cruel wrong. The scum! The fool, black hearted scum!"

Hervey's rage was melodramatic. But the girl, even to the depths of her misery and distraught feelings, was unpersuaded. Her heart cried out for her lover and proclaimed his innocence in terms which would not be ignored. His image rose before her mind's eye, and she looked upon that a truly strong face, the signs of bearing of that man a figure, and the story she had only listened to became clarified as her faith in him rose superior to the evidence of her senses. It could not be. Her quivering lips struggled to frame the words she intended to utter, but no sound came. Hervey's words had struck the appearance of deep honest sorrow for his sister's paralyzation and his pushed aside in her heart.

The man moved forward to her side, and touched her gently on the shoulders.

"Come, Prue, we had best go back to the house. I can do no work to-day. You, too, need quiet for reflection. The heartless s---! And he harped upon the information he had gathered, added he now.

Prudence did not intend to be seduced. She did not care whether she went or what happened. She was incapable of reasoning. She was stunned by the cruel blow that had fallen. Later she would recover herself. For all such things are but passing, in walking moments in life and reason cannot long remain inert and sanity obtain. But the present she was a mere automaton.

Hervey grew unconsciously at the girl's prolonged silence. He cared nothing for her feelings, he cared nothing for the heart he had broken. He cared only for the money he had not yet received. He realized only too well that whatever protest his sister might offer, he had convinced her of his innocence. It was but a question of time before she admitted it, too. But a mere feeling of doubt prompted him to secure his wage without delay. Thus his greed rushed him on to a false trail.

He hastened to the house he broke the silence.

"Well, Prue, you cannot refute my evidence. Tredale is the man you have all been seeking. I have served you well. You yourself have escaped a curse which would have brought you lasting regret. Think of it! What

would it have meant to you had you married the man? Terrible! Terrible!"

The girl looked up. There was a wild, troubled look in her eyes. Her brother's words had in some way driven her at bay. He had struck a chord which had set her nerves on edge. A suddenly arising passion surged to her lips and flamed forth in aathing torrent. She remembered what his story had been told her, she had forgotten for the moment as she had forgotten his part, and had thought only that what he had said was the outcome of his regard for her. Now she turned from him like a fugitive.

"Indeed," she cried, a flush of rage sweeping up into her face as the words burst from between her teeth. "I have come to set the man. Your thoughts have nothing to do with the setting out of human justice. You want a sum for your brother's work. I mother you! What curse is on me that such a son of mine have been born into it! You also have your money, do you hear? You shall have it, and with it goes my curse. It is not yet. My roads are not laid. I do not believe you, your story has not yet need me. I can see no reason to it. Ha, ha!" and she laughed hysterically. "You cannot make me believe it because I will not. You shall have your money. I will not go back on my word, but you must find the exact sum. You shall convince me of the reason in your story. You will even swear it, for you have never uttered anything in your life. Shall I tell you how you will earn it? You will prove your story before judge and jury. When you have convinced them you will have convinced me. Then I will pay you. My God, what tort has brought such misery to the mind of our flesh? If I dredge up the man, he shall pay the extreme penalty, and you—whether you like it or not—shall be instrumental in that punishment. You shall be his accuser, you shall see him to the scaffold. And after it is over, after you have received the sum of your blood-money, I will tell the world of your doings. That you are brother demanded a price for your work. They the world shall know you shall batter you as I batter you. You shall be an outcast wherever you go, stamped with the brand of Judas—the most despised of all men. Better for

you if you stand in George Tredele's place on the scaffold than face the world as branded. 'tis you wretched man you have destroyed my life, my all! ' Go, and bring the police. Go to those whose duty it is to bring to such places as yours. Now I will drive you to it, you shall go whether you like it or not. Refuse and I will lay the information and force you to become a witness. You thought you were dealing with a soft, silly woman, you thought to rouse the pride out of me, and then having obtained what you desired, to leave me to do the work. Fool! You shall earn a just answer. I know the ways of such men as you. If you know what you are doing? Do you know the name that such work as yours goes by? It is blackmail!"

The girl gasped for breath. Then she went on with a bitterness that was almost more than the contempt in all she had said before.

"But rest content. Every penny you have asked for shall be yours when Tredele's crimes are executed. Nor shall I give to the world the story of my brother's perfidy until such time as you have gone out of our world for ever. Go, go from me now. I will not talk beside you."

Her face was a study in villainous expression as he listened to her sister's hysterical denunciation. He knew the reasons of her tirade. He knew that she loved Tredele. He had encouraged her of this however, he knew that. And now woman like she intended upon him. In his hand, her words had destroyed her happiness. But her words smote hard. The lowest nature can not what others think of them, but these others spoken thoughts have a different effect. So it was with Harry. It mattered nothing to him what the girl thought of him—what the world thought of him. But words abuse had still power to move him.

She struck the right note when she said the money down was what he wanted. Now he saw that he had over-reached himself and he cursed himself for having trusted in a woman's promise. There was but one thing left for him to do. He controlled himself well when he replied.

"Very well, sister," he said. "In spite of what you

say, you are going back on your word. You should have thought to fling dirt before you entered into a compact with me. However, I care nothing for all your threats. As you have said, I want money. Nothing else matters to me. So I will go to Winnipeg and see this thing through."

"You certainly will have to do so. Andy shall drive you into town to-night, and I would find it in my heart to wish that I might never see your face again."

"Very well." Hervey laughed harshly. "As you wish. I accept your commands. See you as readily fulfil your part of the contract when the time comes. You do not hoodwink me again with impunity."

And as brother and sister parted, the girl walked on to the house, her feet dragging wearily over the dusty road. Hervey paused unwillingly. His burning eyes, filled with a look of bitter hatred, gazed after the slight figure of his sister, whose life he had so wantonly helped to wreck. Then he laughed cruelly and turned abruptly back on his tracks and returned once more to the harvester.

Prudence gained the house and went straight to her room. She wanted to be alone. She wanted to straighten out the chaos of her thoughts. She heard the chirry voices of her mother and Alice talking in the kitchen. She heard the clatter of plates and dishes, and she knew that those two were waking up. But beyond that she noticed nothing, she did not even see the plump figure of Sarah Gurnidge approaching the house from the direction of Leavenville.

Once in her own little room she flung herself into an arm-chair and sat staring straight in front of her. Her paramount feeling was one of awful horror. The mystery was solved, and George Iredale was the murderer. The mortal alarm clock ticked away upon the wooden top of her bureau and the sound pervaded the room with its steady throb. Her feelings, her thoughts, seemed to pulsate in concert with its rhythm. The words which expressed her dominant emotion hammered themselves into her brain with the steady precision of the ticking—

"George Iredale, the murderer of Leslie Grey!"

The moments passed, but time brought the girl no relief.

All thought of the man who had told her of this thing had passed from her. Only the fact remained. Now in the seat with nerves tingling and whirling brain, a flush of blood mounted to her head, her brain became hot, and she seemed to be looking out on a red world. The ticking of the clock grew fainter and more distant. The room seemed to diminish in size, while the objects about her drew nearer and nearer. A sense of compression was here, although she seemed to be going out over some great distance with everything around her in due perspective.

Mechanically she rose and opened the window, then she returned to her chair with something of the action of an automaton.

And as she sat the blood seemed to secede from her brain and an icy death set upon her features. She was numbed with a sort of pain of bone, and the measured beat of the clock no longer powdered out the world of her thought. Only her heart beat furiously and she was conscious of a burning head. Something was wrong with her but she was incapable of realizing what it was.

She moved, the chair creaked under her, and again thought flowed through her brain. It came with a rush, the deadly numbness had gone as quickly as it had come, and once more her face beat excitedly. Now the realized pain, bitter despair, impotence in a sudden, overwhelming flood. She shrank back into the chair as though to avoid physical blows which were being rained upon her by some unseen hand.

Presently she started up with a faint cry. She walked across the room and back again. She paused at the bureau, muttering—

"It can't be! It can't be!" she said to herself in an agony of terror. "George is too good, too honest. Ah—"

Her love cried out for the man, but reason checked her while her heart tried to rush her into extravagant hopefulness. Irredeemable had admitted the suggestion. She had seen with her own eyes the dog at the graveyard. And therein lay the key to everything. Leslie had said no with his dying breath. But as this thought came to her it was chased away by her love in a fresh burst of fervour. She could not believe it. There must be some awful, some horrible mistake.

Slowly her mind steadied itself, the long years of calmness which she had spent amidst the profound peace of the prairie helped her. She gripped herself lest the dreadful thought of what she had heard should drive her to madness. She went over what she had been told with a keen examination. She listened to her own arguments for and against the man she loved. She went back to the time when Leslie had told her of his "coup." She remembered everything so well. She paused as she reflected her dead lover's anger at George's coming to the party. And for a moment, her heart almost stood still. She asked herself, had she misinterpreted his meaning? Had there been something underlying his expressed displeasure at George's coming which related to what he knew of his George Iredale, doings at the ranch? Every word he had said came back to her. She remembered that he had finished up his protest with a broken sentence.

"And besides——"

There was a significance in those words now which she could not help dwelling upon. Then she put the thought from her as her faith in her lover reassured itself. But the effort was a feeble one, her love was being overwhelmed by the damning evidence.

She moved restlessly from the bureau to the window. The curtained aperture looked out upon the far-reaching corn fields, which were now only a mass of brown stubble. In the distance beyond the dyke, she could see the white strains of the traction-engine and the figures of many men working. The carts and ricks were moving in the picture, but for all else the view was one of peaceful, unbroken calm.

Her mind passed on to the time when the party had broken up. She remembered how in searching for Iredale she had found the two men quarrelling, or something in that nature. Again Leslie had been on the verge of telling her something but the moment had gone by and he had kept silent. She tried to deny the significance of these things, but reason checked her, and her heart sank to zero. And she no longer tried to defend her lover.

Then came the recollection of that picnic. The screech-owls; the boats laden with these human freight moving

suspension over the waters of the great lake. She thought of the graveyard and the ghostly procession. And at the time her heart was aching and the protests of her heart slowly died out. If she had doubted Harvey's words all these things of which she now thought were facts evident to her own senses. The hard light in her eyes changed to the bright flush of anger. This man had come to her with his love, she reminded herself, and she had yielded to him all that she had power to bestow. The brown eyes grew darker until their glowing depths partially screened those of her brother.

As the anger in her heart rose her pain increased, and she receded in horror at the thought that this man had dared to offer her his love while his hands were stained with black crime. At best he was a law breaker, at the worst he was—

She paced her room with agitated steps. The blood rose to her head again, and she felt dizzy and dazed. What could she do? What must she do? She longed for some one to whom she could tell all that was in her heart but she could not speak of it, she dared not. She felt that she must be going mad. Through all her agony of mind she knew that she loved this man who was—a murderer.

She told herself that she hated him, and she knew that she lied to deceive herself. No, no, he was not guilty. He had not been proved guilty, and no man is guilty until he is proved so. Thoughts crowded thick and fast on her sorely taxed brain, and again and again her hands went up to her head with the action of one who is mentally distracted. But in spite of the conflict that raged within her the angry light in her eyes grew, and a look which was out of all keeping with the sweet face was slowly settling itself upon her features. Again she cried in her heart, "What shall I do?"

Suddenly a light broke through her darkness and revealed to her a faint course. This man must not be judged, at least by her, without a hearing. Why should she not go to him? Why not charge him with the story? If he were the murderer, perhaps he would strike her to the earth and add her to the list of his victims. She laughed bitterly. It would be good to die by his hand.

she thought. Under any circumstances life was not worth living. The thought fascinated her. Yes, she would do it. Then her spirit of justice rose and rebelled. No. He would then go unpunished. Lesser death would remain unanswered. The murderer would have triumphed.

She thought long. She moved restlessly about the room. And as the hours passed a demon seemed to come to her and take hold of her. It was the demon which looked out of her brother's eyes, and which now looked out of hers. He whispered to her, and her willing ears listened to all he said. Her heart, torn by conflicting passions, drank in the cruel promptings.

"Why not kill him? Why not kill him?" suggested the demon. "If he is guilty, kill him, and your life will not have been lived in vain. If he be a murderer it were but justice. You will have fulfilled your promise of vengeance. After that you could turn your hand against yourself."

And her heart echoed the question, "Why not?"

For nearly an hour she continued to pace her room. Yes, yes! Here was the right, she told herself. If he were the murderer she did not care to live. They should be together, they should journey beyond together. She thought over all the details, and all the time the demon looked out of her eyes and jugged her with fresh arguments when her heart failed her. She knew where her brother kept his pistol. She would wait until he had set out for Winnipeg. Then, on the morrow, she would ride over to Lonely Ranch.

She nursed her anger, she encouraged it at every turn. And she longed for the morrow. But outwardly she grew calm. Only her eyes betrayed her. And they were not the eyes of perfect sanity. They glowed with a lurid fire, the fire which shone in the fierce, dark eyes of her brother.

## CHAPTER XVI

### AN HERO FROM THE ALASKAN MOUNTAINS

Aber searched all over the farm for her friend. The last place in which she thought Eberling was the little bedroom the two girls shared. Here at length she arrived, and a shock awaited her.

Prudence was sitting beside the window. She was gazing out at the bare, harvested fields, and let her turn at her friend's approach. It was not until Aber spoke that she looked round.

"Here you are, Prue! Why whatever is the matter?" she exclaimed, as she noted the grey pallor of the face before her, the drawn lines about the mouth, the fireless burning eyes. "You poor girl, you are ill, and you never told me a word about it. I have been looking every where for you. It is tea time. What is it, dear?"

"Do I look ill?" Prudence asked weakly. She passed her hand across her forehead. She was almost dazed. Then she went on as she turned again to the window. "I'm all right, my head is aching—that's all. I don't think I want any tea." The next moment she was all alertness. "Has Eberley returned from the fields?"

"Hervey? Yes, why?" He returned and gone away again, gone into Winnipeg. He nearly frightened poor mother Eberley out of her wits. One in all of a sudden had declared he must hurry off to Winnipeg at once, and he wanted Andy to drive him. You know the way. He wouldn't give any explanation. He was like a bear to his mother. My fingers were just itching to slap his face. But come along, dear, you must have some tea. It'll do your head good."

While she was speaking Aber's eyes never left her friend's face. There was something about Prudence's expression she didn't like. Her mind at once reverted to thoughts of fever and convulsions and such things, but she said nothing that might cause alarm. She merely permitted when the others about her head.

Eventually her persuasions prevailed.

"Mother Hephzibah's fretting away down-stairs and Sarah is backin' her up. The long-suffering Mary has been catchin' it in consequence. So come along and be your most cheerful self, Prue. The poor old dears must be humoured."

And Alice with gentle insistence led her companion down to the parlour.

"And where, miss, have you been all this precious time?" asked Mrs. Mallings, when the two girls reached the parlour. "Sleeping, I'll be bound, to judge by them spectacles around your eyes. There's no get up about young folk now-a-days," she went on, turning to Sarah. "Six hours' sleep for healthy-minded women, I may; not an hour more nor an hour less. Sister Emma was allus one o' them for her sys-esta." Then she turned back to Prudence. "Maybe she learned you, my girl."

"I haven't been sleeping, mother," Prudence protested, taking her place at the table. "I don't feel very well."

"Ah, you don't say so," exclaimed the old lady, all anxiety at once. "An' why didn't you tell me before? Now maybe you've got a touch o' the sun?"

"Have you been faint and giddy?" asked Sarah, fixing her quiet eyes upon the girl's face.

"No, I don't think so. I've got a headache—nothing more."

"Ah, cold bath and lemon soda," observed her mother practically.

"Tea, and be left alone," suggested Sarah.

"Nature designs all human ills, but in the making  
Begins the cure which best is for the taking."

Her steady old eyes seemed able to penetrate more outward signs.

"Quite right, 'Aunt' Sarah," said Alice decidedly. "Leave the nostrums and quackeries alone. Prue will be all right after a nice cup of tea. Now, mother Hephzibah, one of your best for the invalid, and, please, I'll have some more ham."

"That you shall, you flighty harum-scarum. And to think o' the likes o' you dictating to me about nostrums and physickings," replied the farm-wife, with a comfortable laugh. "I'll soon be having Mary teaching me to炮 a buckwheat 'slap-jack.' Now see an' out from

the sides o' that barn where the curin's primest. I do allow as the barns didn't curv just so, last winter. Folks at my board must have of the best."

"I never knew any one to get anything else here," laughed Alice. Then she turned her head sharply and not listening.

Mrs. Malling looked over towards the window. Prudence silently sipped her tea, keeping her eyes lowered as much as possible. She knew that, in spite of their talk these kindly people were worried about her, and she tried hard to relieve their anxiety.

"Some one for us," said Alice as the sound of horse's hoofs came in through the open window.

"Some one from Lakeville, I expect," said Mrs. Malling, making a guess.

"That's George Iredale's horse," said Sarah, who had detected the sound of a pacer's gait.

Prudence looked up in a startled, frightened way. Sarah was looking directly at her. She made no further comment aloud but contented herself with a quiet mental note.

"Something wrong," she thought, "and it's to do with him. Poor child, poor child! Maybe she's fretting her self because—"

Her reflections were abruptly broken off as the sound of a man's voice hauling at the front door penetrated to the parlour.

"Any one in?" cried the voice; and instantly Alice sprang to her feet.

"It's Robbi!" she exclaimed. There was a clatter as her chair fell back behind her, she nearly fell over it, reached the door, and the next moment those in the parlor heard the sound of joyous exclamations proceeding from the hall.

Prudence's expression was a world of relief. Her mother was overjoyed.

"This is real good. Bring him in! Bring him in. Miss Thoughtless! Don't keep him there a-phlaudering when there's good fare in the parlour!"

"Love feeds on know, as used to ancient say,  
Blessing the love of yore, not of to-day."

whispered Sarah, with a pensive smile, while she turned expectantly to greet the visitor.

Raduant, her face shining with conscious happiness,

Alice led her fiancé into the room. And Robb Chillingwood found himself sitting before the farm-wife's generous board almost before he was aware of it. While he was being served he had to face a running fire of questions from at least three of the ladies present.

Robb was a cheerful soul and ever ready with a pleasant laugh. This snatched holiday from a stress of undepaused work was like a "bunk" to a school-boy. It was more delightful to him by reason of the knowledge that he would have to pay up for it afterwards with extra exertions and overtime work.

"You didn't tell us when you were coming," said Alice.

"Didn't know myself. Thought I'd ride over from Iredale's place on spec'."

"And you're come from there now?" asked Mrs. Malling.

Prudence looked up eagerly.

"Yes, I've just bought all his stock for a Scotch client of mine."

"Heath?" Sarah turned away with a motion of disgust.

"What, has George sold all his beasts at last?" exclaimed the farm-wife.

"Why, yes. Didn't you know? He's giving up his ranch."

Robb looked round the table in surprise. There was a pause. Then Mrs. Malling broke it—

"He has spoken of it hinted. But we wasn't expectin' it so soon. He's made his pile."

"Yes, he must have done so," said Robb readily. "The price he parted with his cattle to me for was ridiculous. I shall make a large profit out of my client. It'll all help towards furnishing, Al." he went on, turning to his fiancée.

"I'm so glad you are doing well now, Robb," the girl replied, with a happy smile.

"Yes." Then the man turned to Mrs. Malling. "We're going to get married this fall. I hope Alice has been learning something of housekeeping" with a laugh.

"Why, yes. Alice knows a great deal more than she reckons to let on, I guess," said the farm-wife, with a fat chuckle.

Prudence now spoke for the first time since Robb's arrival. She looked up suddenly, and, though she tried hard to speak conversationally, there was a slightly eager ring in her voice.

"When is George Iredale going to leave the ranch?"

Robb turned to her at once.

"I can't say. Not yet, I should think. He seems to have made no preparations. Besides, I've got to see him again in a day or two."

"Then why isn't he here?" asked Alice eagerly.

"Well, no. Is it such his habit with a continual expression of chagrin? I can't be sure of all that. But I'll be over here when I'm in the neighborhood, if possible." Then to Mrs. Melting. "May I?"

"Very certain," said the Farmer, with characteristic air of authority. "If you come to this district, about as much as a look in here, well, you can just pass right along for the future."

When the meal was over the old lady rose from the table.

"Alice," said she, "you stay in, there. Sarah and I'll clear away. Prudence, my girl, get the down and get yourself. Maybe you'll feel better later on. Come along, Sarah, the young folks can get on comfortably without us for once."

Prudence made no attempt to do as her mother suggested. She moved about the room helping with the work. Then the two old ladies advanced to the kitchen. Robb and Alice had moved over to the well-worn sofa at the far end of the room, and Prudence took up her position at the open window. She seemed to have no thought of leaving the two together; in fact it seemed as though she had forgotten their existence altogether. She stood staring out over the little fruit garden with half-closing eyes. From her expression it is doubtful if she saw what her eyes looked upon. Her thoughts were of other matters that concerned only herself and another.

The low tones of the voices sounded merrily through the room. They too, were now wrapped in their own concerns, and had forgotten the presence of the girl at the window. They had so much to say and so little time in which to say it, for Robb had to make Amende that night.

The cool August evening was drawing on. The threshing gang was returning from the fields, and the people here of sundown was ringing above the eastern horizon. Prudence did not move. Her hands were clasped before her, her pale face might have been of marble statue. There was only the faintest sign of life about her, and that was the steady rise and fall of her bosom.

A cool breeze rustled in through the open window and set the curtains moving. Then all became still again. Two birds squabbled viciously amongst the branches of a blue gum in the little patch of a garden. In the distance a gosse was still daintly towards the horizon. She saw nothing, she felt nothing but the pain which her own thoughts brought her.

Suddenly the sound of something moving outside became louder. There was the noisy yawn of some large animal rising from its rest. Then came the slow, heavy patter of the creature's feet. Niche approached the window. His fierce looking head stood well above the sill. His greenish eyes looked up solemnly at the still figure framed in the opening. His ears were half atten-tively. There was no hasty motion of his straight, lank tail, but his appearance was undoubtedly expressive of some sort of wild and meaning animal regard. Whether the dog understood and sympathized with the girl at the window it would have taken something more than a keen observer to have said. But in his strangely unaccustomed liaison he was certain of his going to do or say something to the girl from whom he was accustomed to receive nothing but kindness.

For some moments he stood thus, quite still. His unkempt body rose and fell under his wiry coat. He was a wolf beast, and the wolf grey and black of his coloring was horribly suggestive of his ancestry. Presently he lifted one great paw to the window. Burying his nail in upon his only serviceable hand he held himself and stood with both front feet upon the sill and pushed his nose against the girl's dream. She awoke from her reverie at the touch, and her hands unloosed, and she slowly turned the head around. The animal seemed to appreciate the attention for with his powerful paws, he drew himself further into the room.

The girl offered no objection. She paid no heed to what he was doing. Her hand merely rested on his head and she thought no more about him. Finding himself unrebuked Niche made further efforts than these, so he became aware of the other occupants of the room. Quick as a flash his nose was directed towards the old sofa on which they were seated, and his eyes, like two balls of phosphorescent light, glistened in their direction. He

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because nothing of ours. It seemed as though he were uncertain of something.

He was obliged to meet the presence of these two, but the excess of the cold, which had checked any further movement beyond a shiver, had given him his charge.

The distressing sound died away a little, and she looked over to where Phœbe now was standing. It was then she remembered the singular stare of the hound's wicked eyes. The sight had held her for a moment, and could she suppress a slight shudder. She judged her own powers and drew her attention without speaking. Reid followed the direction of her gaze, and a murmur followed what he observed the strange appearance.

He could only see the head a hand, the rest of the creature was hidden behind the window curtain, and its movements suggested the great bulk and powerful bursts which remained unexercised. To it all there was a suggestion of hell about the cruel beauty of the watching eyes.

At last he broke into a little nervous laugh.

"By Jove," he said, "I thought for the moment I'd got 'em. Gee whiz! The brute looks like the dead Comif. What is it? Whose?"

"Whose? Herring? Alice, said to her friend.

"Let Herring come on. That's all I have," That is," deliberately, "if you think it's safe." Then she turned to Alice. "He is a savage that I'm afraid of him. And with Phœbe here, I think he is to all right, he is devoted to her."

At the sound of the girl's voice Phœbe turned back from the window like one awakening from a dream. Her eyes still had a faraway look in them, and though she had heard the voice it seemed doubtful as to whether she had taken the meaning of the words. For a moment her eyes rested on Alice's face, then they dimmed to the dog at her side, but Alice was forced to repeat her question before the other moved. Then, however, she stepped back and commanded the dog to her with a movement of command. Phœbe needed no second bidding. There was a scream, and a snapping of sharp claws upon the window-pane, then the glass stood in the room. And her attitude showed the two gazed upon the sofa with as proudly as possible. "Well, which one is it to be first?"

Reid left quickly. Alice was doubtless charmed at the dog's treacherous appearance.

But the tension was relieved a moment later by the brute's own signs of behaviour. Suddenly, without the slightest warning, Neebe plumped down upon his hind quarters. His pricked ears drooped, and his two fore paws began to beat a sort of tattoo upon the floor. Then followed a moment when, barking and bauldishing, and the great head moved from side to side with that curious movement which only dogs use to express their gladness. Then the strange, the weird beast went further. Down he threw himself full length upon the floor and growled ruminatively while gazing, scraping the boards in a perfect fervour of abject delight.

Robb looked hard at the dog. Then he laughed and turned to Anne.

"What is the creature's name? I didn't catch it."

"Neebe" she replied.

Robb held out his hand encouragingly and called the dog by name. The animal continued to wag, but did not offer to come nearer. Every now and then its head was turned back, and the green eyes looked up into Prudence's face. At last Robb ceased his efforts. His blandishments were ineffectual beyond increasing the dog's effusive display.

"A bushy," he said, looking across at Prudence. "A bad dog to have about the house. He reminds me of the animals we had up north in our dog train. They're devils to handle and as fierce as wild cats. We had one just like him. Unusually big brute. He was our 'wheeler.' The most vicious dog of the lot. The resemblance is striking. By Jove!" he went on remissently "he was a sulky, cantankerous brute. His name was 'Sitting Bull,' after the renowned Sioux Indian chief. We had to be very careful of the other dogs on account of his 'scrapping' propensities. He killed one poor beast. I think we nicknamed him rather appropriately. He was affectionately dubbed 'Bully'."

As Robb pronounced the name he held out his hand again and flicked his fingers. The dog rose from his sprawling posture and came eagerly forward, wagging his lank tail. He rutted his nose against the man's hand and slowly licked the sun-tanned skin.

Robb's brows drew together in a pucker of deep perplexity. He looked the animal over long and earnestly,

and slowly there crept into his eyes an expression of wondering astonishment. He was interrupted in his inspection by the girl at his side.

"Why, he is treating you like an old friend, Robb."

The man sat gazing down upon the wiry coat of the beast.

"Yes," he said shortly. Then he looked over at Prudence. "Yours?" he went on.

The girl shook her head.

"No, he belongs to Hervey."

"Um! I wonder where he got him from," in a meditative tone.

"Somewhere out in the wilds of the Yukon," put in Alice.

"Ah! The Yukon." And the man's face was serious as he turned towards the window and looked out at the creeping shadows of evening.

There was a pause. Prudence was thinking of anything but the subject of Robb's inquiries. Alice was curious, but she forbore to question. She had heard her lover's account of his misadventure in the Alaskan hills, but she saw no connection between the hound and that disastrous affair. But the man's thoughts were hard at work. Presently he rose to depart.

He bade Prudence good-bye and moved towards the door. The dog remained where he had been standing and looked after him. At the door Robb hesitated, then he turned and looked back.

"Poor old Bully," he said.

With a bound the dog was at his side. Then the man turned away, and, accompanied by Alice, left the room. In the passage he paused, and Alice saw an expression on his face she had never seen before. He was nervous and excited, and his eyes shone in the half light.

"Al," he said slowly, "I know that dog. And his name is Bully. Don't say anything to anybody. Hervey may be able to tell me something of those who robbed us up in the hills. But on no account must you say anything to him, leave it to me. I shall come here again—soon. Good-bye, little woman."

That evening as Robb Chillingwood rode back to Ainsley, he thought of many things, but chiefly he reviewed the details of that last disastrous journey when he and Grey had traversed the snow-fields of Alaska together.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE LAST OF LONELY RANCH

THESE are moments which come in all lives when calm reflection is powerless to influence the individual acts, when calmness, even in the most plangent natures, is impossible, when a tide of impulse sweeps us on, giving us not even so much as a breathless momentary pause in which to consider the result of our headlong career. We blunder on against every jagged obstacle, lacerated and bleeding, jolting cruelly from point to point, whether our passions irresistibly drive us. It is a blind, reckless journey, from which there is no escape when the tide sets in. We see our goal ahead, and we fondly believe that before it is ahead we must come to it. We do not consider the awful road we travel, nor the gradual exhaustion which is overtaking us. We do not realise that we must fall by the wayside for lack of strength, nor even, if our strength be sufficient to carry us on to the end, do we ask ourselves, shall we be able to draw aside out of the raging torrent when our goal is reached? or shall we be swept on to the yawning Beyond where, for evermore, we must continue to struggle hopelessly to return? Once give passion unchecked sway, and who can say what the end will be?

It was at such a moment in her life at which Prudence had arrived. Her mind was set upon an object which absorbed all her faculties, all her brain, all her feelings. Had she been able to pause, even for one moment, reason must have asserted itself and she would have understood the folly of what she was doing. But that moment was denied her. All the latent passions of a strong nature had been let loose and she was swept on by their irresistible tide. She believed that she was the appointed

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a anger of the man she had once loved, and that the dog of the world could be a traitor, the stain of which nothing could wipe out. Irodele must be confronted, challenged, and——

And so she went to Lendly Ranch on her self-imposed errand of justice.

The man the night was not in the house when she came. The valley seemed to be devoid of life as she rode up. But the solitude was not of exactly broken by the appearance of Chants from the region of the barn. She dismounted long in search of her master and passed into the lumbered sitting room to await his coming.

She was restless and her nerves were strung to a great tension. Her eyes still shone with that peculiar light which ever seemed to look out of her brother's. There was no resting in the set of her mouth. Her voice disfigured the sweetness which usually characterized her beautiful features.

She stood before the window looking out upon the shadow-bathed valley. She saw before her the dark wall of foliage which rose in the heights of the forest hill. Not a living soul was about only was there a young wolf which disturbed the unbroken forest of pines. She turned abruptly from the view as though she could not bear the solitude which was then made so apparent. She turned over to where the lumber case stood against the wall and passed in there, to the guard room. But she comprehended nothing of what she saw. She was thinking thinking, and her mind was in a tumult of hysterical know. And she was listening too, listening for a sound

any sound other than that which the wind made. She turned the case over to the table and leaned against it in an effort of exhaustion. She shivered, she stood up to steady herself and she shivered again. And all the time the frowned eyes glistened in their beautiful oval setting, the lips were drawn towards, and there remained only a sharp defined line to mark the sweet mouth. Presently her lips parted and she moistened them with her tongue. A lower seemed to be open her, and mouth and throat were parched.

Suddenly the sound for which she waited came. She started eagerly to the window and saw Chants pass round

in the direction of the barn. Then she saw the burly figure of the man she was awaiting appear in the clearing fronting the house.

George Irredale came along at a robust gait. He was clad in molekin riding breeches, much stained with clay, as though he had been digging, a soft shirt, the sleeves of which were rolled up above the elbow, his Stetson hat was adjusted at the correct angle upon his head, and he wore a pair of tan-coloured field boots, much smeared with the signs of toil. He came rapidly towards the house. There was nothing furtive, nothing guilty about this man's bearing, he came readily to meet his visitor, and his appearance was the confident bearing of a man who has little to fear.

She saw him look towards the window where she stood, and his smile of welcome set her nerves to a jolt with a sensation she failed to understand. Her hand went round to the pocket of her linen riding skirt and remained there. She heard his step in the hall, she heard him approach and turn the door handle. As he came into the room she faced him.

"Why Prudence, this is a delightful—" he began. But she interrupted him coldly.

"One moment," she said, and her voice was hoarse with the dryness of her throat. "I have not come over for any visit of pleasure but strictly upon a matter of—of—business. There are some explanations which we both need to make, but more especially you."

"Yes."

Irredale was gazing earnestly into the face before him. He was trying to fathom the meaning of her coldness. For the moment he wondered, then, slowly, he began to understand that Harry had been at work.

"You got my note," he said, choosing to ignore the result of his observations. "My delay in calling at the farm was unavoidable. I am in the midst of disposing of my ranch. I had not expected that I should have been called upon to do so so soon. I beg that you will forgive me what must seem an unwarrantable delay."

Prudence's nerves were so strong that she felt as though she could strike him for his calm words. Her condition demanded the opposition of passive equal to her own.

His coolness unnerved her. So long had she dwelt upon the accusation Hervey had brought against him that she believed in this man's guilt. The evidence of her own senses had testified against him, and now she steeled herself in an armor of disbelief. But in spite of herself the dictates of her heart were still pressing hard to find the joints of her armour. Nor were the strifes lessened now that she stood confronting him. His caresses though maddening to her, was not without effect. The moral influence he wielded was great.

She backed to the table, then she plunged into the subject of her mission without further preamble. Her eyes stared sternly into his, and her tones sounded incisively in the stillness of the room.

"I little knew the man whom I was listening to when he offered me his life, nor had I any idea of it a hour I was to the man who reported the words which have appeared in the paper—the words which were the last Leslie Grey ever uttered. What must have been your feelings when I told you that I knew them a sinner to be a murderer?" Then, in threatening bitterness. "But your feelings must have long since been dead, dead as the poor creature you so wantonly sent to his reckoning. The time has come for you to defend yourself, that is, if defence you can offer. No human cause or extenuation will cover you. Even the Scriptures teach us that the penalty is 'a life for a life.' Yours is the hand that struck Leslie down, and now you must face the consequences of your wanton act."

It took a quiet even never attempted to avoid the girl's direct gaze, nor did he flinch as the accusation fell from her lips. Never was he more alert, never more gently disposed towards this half-demented creature than at that moment. He recognized the hand that had been at work, and he laid no blame upon her. His feelings were of sorrow—sorrow for the woman he loved, and sorrow for himself. But his thoughts were chiefly for her. He knew as she had said that his time had come.

"So Hervey has been to you to tell the discovery which I reported at the price he asked. He told you that I was a sinner; that the announcement in the paper was mine. And did he tell you that I was the murderer of

Leslie Grey? Or did your heart prompt you to that conclusion?"

The girl supported herself against the table with one hand, and the other was still in the pocket behind her head. He did not notice these things without moving his eyes from her face.

"Hervey told me the facts and the inevitable proof they bore. But was his statement exaggerated? My own reason told me that."

The man sighed. He had hoped that the work had been out of the brother's doing. He had hoped that she had come bearing Hervey's accusation and not her own.

"Go on," he said.

"I know you for what you really are, George Fredale. And now I have come to you to give you the chance of defending yourself. No man must be condemned without a hearing. Neither shall you. The evidence against you is overwhelming. I can see no escape for you. But speak if you have anything to say in your defence, and I will listen. I have given you until the end of Leslie Grey."

Just for one brief moment Fredale felt a shiver pass through his body. The very tones of the girl's voice, the seemly and passionate way it filled him with a terror unpredictable. Then he pulled himself together. He was on his defence before the one person in the world from whom coddling or cajolery he shrank. He did not answer at once. He wished to make no mistake. When at last he spoke his words came slowly as though he weighed well each syllable before he gave it utterance.

"With one exception in all that Hervey has doubtless said of me is true. I am a simpleton, I inspired that line in the paper, but I am no murderer. Leslie Grey's life was so red to me at the time if only for the reason that he was your efficient husband. I loved you at that time as I have loved you for years, and all my thoughts and wishes were for your happiness. It would have made you happy to have married Grey, therefore I wished that you should marry him. I am quite unchanged. I will tell you now what neither you nor Hervey knows, even though it makes my case look blacker. I knew that Grey was on my track. I knew that he had discovered my secret. How he had done so I cannot say. He quarrelled

with me, and, in the heat of his anger, told me of his intentions. It was late one night at a card party at your house, and just before he was so foully murdered. No doubt you, or any right-minded person for that matter, will say that this evidence only clinches the case against me. But, in spite of it, I assert my innocence. Amongst my many sins the crime Hervey charges me with "he purposely avoided associating the charge with her"—is not numbered. Can I hope that you will believe me?"

The gentle tones in which the burly man spoke, the earnest fearlessness which looked out from his quiet eyes, gave infinite weight to all he said. Prudence shook her head slowly, but the fire in her eyes was less bright, and the voice of her own heart crying out began to make itself heard in the midst of her chaotic thought.

She tried to stiffen herself for the task she had undertaken, but the result was not all she sought. Still, she replied coldly—

"How can I believe with all the black evidence against you? You, in all this region, were the one man interested in Leslie's death. His life meant penitentiary to you, his death meant liberty. Your own words tell me that. How can I believe such a denial as you now make? Tell me, have you no proof to offer? Account for the day on which Leslie met his death, prove your movements upon that day."

The girl's denial of belief was belied by the eagerness in her voice. For one brief instant a flash of hope rose in her. She saw a loophole for her lover. She longed to believe him. But the hope died down, leaving her woe distractred for its coming.

For Iredale did not speak, and his face assumed a look of gloom.

"Ah, you cannot— you cannot!" she went on hysterically. "I might have known, I did know." A world of passion again leapt into her eyes. Then something of the woman broke through her anger, and a heart breaking pitifulness sounded in her voice. "Oh, why, why did you do this thing? Why did you stain your hands with such a crime as murder? What would his living have meant to you? At worst the penitentiary. Was it worth it to destroy thus the last chance of your immortal

soul? Oh, God! And to think of it! A murderer!" Then the fierce anger became dominant once more. "But you shall not escape. Your crime shall be expiated as far as human crimes can be expiated. The gall we await you, George Irdale, and your story shall be told to the world. You shall hang unless you can give to judge and jury a better denial than you have given to me." She suddenly broke off. A whistling indrawn breath started the man to life her. She gazed round her whilst she had remembered what she had come for. She had forgotten when she had talked of "judge and jury." Her face assumed a ghastly hue at the recollection. Her eyes alone still told of the madness that possessed her.

Not was Irdale with it an uneasy feeling at what he saw—that catch of breath—that hunted look as she gazed about the room. Intuition served him in the moment of crisis. What was the man's guilt? Why was that hand concealed in her dress? There was only one possible answer to such questions, and he read the answer at first.

"Prudence," he said in his deep musical voice, whilst his keen eyes riveted her attention, "I can prove my innocence of the crime you charge me with. Listen to me patiently and I will tell you how. Do not let your anger drive you to any rash act, which might bring you—life-long regret."

The girl made a sharp ejaculation. But she did not attempt to interrupt him.

"I can prove that I was not within three hundred miles of this place on the day of Leslie's death," the man went on. "That I was in a city to the west of here distributing—bitterly—" my woes. I can prove all this to you. And I intend that before you leave me to-day you shall be a witness to my innocence, even against all pre-judge. But before judge and jury it will be different—very different." He sighed. "There I cannot prove my innocence, for to do so would be to betray my comrades—those who have traded with me and trusted me—and send them to the penal servitude which also awaits me." His eyes had become reflective. He seemed to be talking to himself now rather than to the woman before him. "No, I cannot save myself at such a cost. Even to escape the gallows I will not play the part of Judas."

The woman made no reply. She stood staring at him with all that was best in her shining in her eyes. She was trying to follow his every word and to take his meaning and the one thought which dominated her whole mind was his expressed ability to prove his innocence to her.

He seemed to awake from some melancholy reverie, and again his eyes sought hers.

"Do you wish me to prove my innocence?"

"Yes; you must—you shall!"

The girl moved from the table; and for the first time during the interview her hand was removed from the pocket in her skirt. Hope filled the heart in which but now the fires of hell had seemed to burn. She drank in his words with a soul consuming thirst. The proof! That was what she required.

Irakale went on with grave gentleness.

"The proof is in here." He moved to the book-case and opened a secret room in the back of it. "In this cupboard."

He produced a roll of books and brought them to the table. Picking out one he opened it at the date of Lorry's death. It was a day. He read out the entries for the entire week, all of which bore out his testimony. Every one was dated at a different town or village, and related to his sales of opium. He then opened another book and showed the entries of his sales and the like. He went through the whole roll, book after book, and all of them bore out his statement as to his whereabouts. Then he produced several contracts, these were deeds between himself and various traders and were dated at the towns at which they were signed. Each book and paper he passed on to Prudence for her attentive drawing her attention to the corroboration in the evidence. There could be no doubt as to the genuineness of these facts, and the girl's last shadowy doubts of his innocence evaporated before the overwhelming detail. The hope which had filled her heart was now replaced by a triumphant joy. This man had shown her had convinced her, and she wanted nothing more at that moment.

She looked up into his face, hoping to see a reflection of her own happiness in it. But there was no happiness there. His face was calm, but the melancholy had disappeared in his eyes. What she saw came like an icy

doubt to her, and the happy expression died upon her lips. She suddenly remembered that he had said he could not use that evidence to publicly declare his innocence.

"But—" she began.

He shook his head. He knew that she wished to protest. For a moment they looked into each other's eyes. Then the woman, the weaker, broke down under the strain. Tears came to her eyes, and she poured out all the pent-up grief of her hours of misery.

"Oh, George," she cried, "can you ever forgive my wickedness? I ought never to have believed. My heart told me that you were innocent, but the evidence—oh, the evidence! I could see no loophole. Everything pointed to you, you. And I, foolish that I am, I believed." And the girl sobbed as though her heart would break. Fredale made no attempt to comfort her, he felt that it would be good for her to weep. She leaned against the table, and after a while her sobs quietened. Then the man touched her upon the shoulder.

"Don't cry, Prue, my heart bleeds for you when I listen to your sobs. You're not to blame for believing me guilty. Twelve juries will shortly do the same, and who can blame them?" He shrugged. "I must face the 'impostor' and take my chance. And now, child," he added, his hand still resting upon her shoulder, and smiling down upon her from his superior height, "give me that which you have concealed in your pocket. We will throw it away."

Prudence sprang up and moved beyond his reach.

"No, not I can't! Don't ask me. Spare me the shame of it. As you love me, George, don't ask me for it."

"As you will, dear. I merely wished to rid ourselves of an ugly presence. While we are together, and it may not be for long now—nothing should come between us, least of all that."

The girl's tears had dried. She looked over at her lover. His compelling influence was upon her. She paused irresolute, then she plunged her hand into her pocket and drew forth a large revolver.

"Here, take it. Take it, and do what you like with it." Then she laughed bitterly. "You know me as I am now. I brought that to shoot you with, and afterwards to shoot myself. You see, I am a murderer at heart." And she smiled bitterly.

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Iredale took the weapon and placed it in his book-case. Then he came to the girl's side and put his arms tenderly about her shoulders.

"Forget it, child, forget it as you would a hideous dream. Your fresh lips were forced upon me by evil through my wicked doing. That which I have done to gain wealth has brought only what might have been expected in its train. No work of evil is without its sting and as is always the case that sting seeks out the most sensitive part of its victim. The chastisement for my wrongdoing has been inflicted with cruel cunning. For you, Puss, have been made to suffer, thus is my punishment a hundredfold greater."

He drew her to him as he spoke and gently smoothed her dark hair. Under the influence of his touch and the sound of his voice the girl calmed. She nestled close to his side and for a moment abandoned herself to the delight of being with him. But her thoughts would not remain idle for long. Suddenly she released herself and moved to arm's length from him.

"George," she said in a tone of suppressed eagerness, "they can not try you for for murder. You will tell them. You will show them all these. For my sake, for the sake of all your friends, you will not let them—no, damn you! Oh, you can't allow it. Think," she went on, more passionately, "no men would willingly let you be declared guilty when they knew you to be innocent. It must not be."

Iredale gave no outward sign. He had turned his face away and was gazing in the direction of the window. His reflective eyes looked out upon the valley, but his resolve was written plainly in them.

"Do not tempt me, Puss," he said quietly. "Were I to do otherwise than I have resolved and obtained an acquittal thereby, I should live a life of utter regret. I should despair myself! I should brothe my own shadow. Nothing could be more revolting to me than the man who plays the part of a traitor and—here I that man life would be impossible to me. Think of it only for one moment, sweetheart, and your own good heart will tell you how impossible is that which you ask me to do. It cannot be. All the world would despise me. But even so its utmost censure would be nothing compared with my own

feelings at the thought that I had saved myself by such methods." He withdraws his hand from her embrace. "No, when the time comes and I am forced to stand my trial for George's murder I shall face it. Nor shall I betray my friends by one single word. And, too, when that time comes there will not remain one single trace of the traffic which has hitherto been part of my very existence. There shall be no possible chance of discovery for those who have trusted me. Your brother Hervey will never hold his hand. I know that. I realized that when he left me after seeking 'blackmail.' His vindictive nature will see that through. And perhaps I would rather have it so. It will then be settled once and for all I may get off but I fear that it will be otherwise."

At the mention of her brother's name Prudence started and the blood receded from her anxious face leaving it ghastly in its place. She had forgotten that he was even now on his way to Winnipeg for the express purpose of denouncing Irvalde. For one instant she stood like an aspen. Then she recovered herself. What was to be done? She tried to think. The matter of Hervey was of her doing. She had driven him to it, urged him to it. Now she realized the full horror of what her foolish credulity had led her into. It had been in her power to stay his hand at least to draw his fangs. Now it was too late. Suddenly she turned upon her lover in one final appeal. At that moment it seemed the only chance of saving him.

"George, there is a way out of it all, one last resource if you will only listen to me. You love me even in spite of the way I have wronged you. You belong to me if only by reason of our love. You have no right to throw your life away when you are innocent. God knows I honour you for your decision not to betray your compatriots. If it were possible, I love you more than ever but the man would be as great to throw your life away for such a shadow as it would be to deliver your friends up to justice. You can save yourself, you must. The border is near. We are right on it. Surely the way you have brought the Chinese into the country should provide an outlet for us. Oh, my poor love, will you not listen to me? Will you not give me the life I crave? George, let us go—together."

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Her words were punctuated. She had stepped forward and clasped her two rough hands upon his great shoulders, and her dark earnest eyes gazed into his eyes up into his.

The temptation was a sore one, but the man found it hard to resist. He experienced a sudden rush of blood to the brain. His body seemed to be on fire. He was pulsating with a wild passion. The thought of what she suggested came near to overthrewing his sternest resolve. To go with her. To have her even as by his side. The thought was quivering. Surely he had never yielded unto that moment before; he knew he loved this woman. But his strong nature came to his rescue at last. The passion that drove him as swiftly as it had come and left him cold and collected.

He gazed down into the brown eyes over so kindly, over so longingly, and his answer came in a tone so gentle that the girl felt that whatever the future might hold for them, this moment had been worth living for.

"No, no sweetheart. It's right even though you should be my companion. We live, we gather blossoms, and for that very fact I could never allow myself to remain under that cloud. At all costs we shall have the matter cleared. I owe it to you, to those at the farm, and to myself."

The girl's hands dropped to her sides and she turned away. Then as the agony of her loss found voice in a broken sobs.

"Oh, God!" she cried. And with that soft cry came the reverberating flash which answered the question she had so repeatedly asked herself. She turned back to her lover, and the upward expression of her face had changed, and in her eyes was the eager light of excitement. Instant was the change, but did not change in its meaning. He felt that she must no longer remain there.

"Child, I want you to go back to the farm and tell them of the accusation that has been brought against me. Tell them all the circumstances of it. Tell them that I have clearly exonerated you of any innocence, but as you love me, I charge you not to reveal the manner in which it was done. Tell your mother that I shall come over to-morrow, and she shall hear the whole story from my own lips. I wish to do this that she may hear me before she reads of what must happen in the papers. After that I shall go into Winnipeg and set the law in motion. I will clear myself or otherwise. But on

your honour you must promise that all I have shown you to-day remains a secret between us."

Prudence listened intently to all he said, but a quiet look of resolve slowly crept into her eyes.

"I promise," she said, and Iredale thanked her with a look.

There was the briefest of pauses; then she went on—

"On one condition"

"What do you mean?"

Iredale looked his surprise.

"Now you must hear me, George," she went on eagerly. "You have charged me with this thing. You must abide by my time. A day more or less can make little difference to you."

"But I wish to give myself up before others can make the charge."

"Just so. And in the meantime I want your promise not to come to the farm until the"—she paused to make a swift mental calculation—"day after to-morrow at four o'clock in the afternoon."

"Tell me your reason."

"That is my own." The girl was smiling now. Then she again became excited. "Promise, promise, promise! There is no time to lose. Even now I fear we are too late."

Iredale looked dubiously at her. Suddenly he saw her face darken.

"Promise!" she demanded almost fiercely, "or I will not abide by my promise to you."

"I promise."

An expression of relief came into Prudence's eyes, and she stepped towards him and looked up into his face.

"Good-bye, George, dearest!"

The man suddenly clasped her in a bear-like embrace and rained passionate, burning kisses on her upturned lips. Then quietly she released herself. She stood away from him holding one of his great hands in both of hers.

"Quick! Now my horse."

Iredale departed, and Prudence was left alone. She stood looking after him thinking, thinking.

"Can I do it?" she asked herself.

Damside City was the nearest telegraph station. It lay nearly thirty-five miles due west of Owl Hoot. It was merely a grain station for the district and in no sense

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a village. She must make that point and so interrupt Hervey with a telegraphic message. It was her one chance. In spite of her lover she would buy Hervey a silence, and trust to the future to set the rest straight. She was strong and her horse was good. She must reach the office before it was closed at six o'clock that evening. She calculated it up, she had just three hours in which to cover the distance. She looked out of the window. The wind was blowing from the east—that was good; it would raise the horse. She looked up at the sky, there were a few clouds scudding westwards.

"You, I'll do it," she said at last, "if it kills poor Kitty."

A moment later Irredale returned with the mare. The girl waited not a moment. Her lover assisted her into the saddle reluctantly. He did not approve this sudden activity on the part of the girl. When she had settled herself she bent down, and their lips met in one long, passionate kiss.

"Good-bye George."

The man waved his adieu. His heart was too full to speak. She swung her mare round and galloped down the valley to the north. Her object was to clear the valley and then turn off to the west on the almost disused trail to Tharside.

Irredale looked after her until the sound of the mare's hoofs died away in the distance. He was filled with wonder at her strange request and her hasty departure. But his speculations brought him to a halt—steer a compass and he turned sharply and called to his man, Chants.

The man hurried from the stable.

"We have been a little hard. Is everything ready?" Irredale looked up at the sky, then down at the grizzled face before him.

Chants nodded.

"Good. Then get to work. Start the first fire directly beyond the graveyard to the east. The wind is getting up steadily. You are sure there are no farms to the west of us between here and Roar River?"

The man gave a negative shake of the head.

"That's all right then. There will be no damage done. And the river will cut the fire off. This time to-morrow we shall be homeless wanderers, Chants—you and I." And the smuggler laughed bitterly.

Then his laugh died out.

"Well, to work. Set the fires going."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE FOREST DEMON PURSUER

PRUDENCE swung her mare out on to the overgrown trail to Damside City. Kitty was a trim-built little "broncho," compact, well ribbed, and with powerful shoulders and chest. She was just the animal to "stay" and travel fast. The road cut through the heart of the Owl Hoot bush, and ran in a diagonal direction, southwest towards the border. Then it converged with the border trail which skirted the great southern muskeg, and, passing through a broken, stony country, went on to Damside.

The wind was rapidly freshening, and the scudding clouds were quickly changing from white to grey, which, to the girl's practised mind, indicated an immediate change of weather. But she thought little of the matter beyond being thankful that the wind was well behind her, she wished to travel fast, and a "fair" wind is as necessary to the horseman, under such circumstances, as it is to the mariner.

For a time the roughness of the road required her attention. Kitty was surefooted, but the outstanding roots with which her path was lined needed careful negotiation. Presently the trail became wider and its surface more even, and signs of recent usage became apparent. The roots were worn down and the projecting stones had been removed. Neither did it take the girl long to decide whose servants had done these things. On the obscure trail were to be seen many signs of the traffic upon which the owner of Lonely Ranch had been engaged. Now Prudence gave Kitty her head, and the mare travelled at a great pace.

The breeze had chastened the laden air of the pine world. The redolent woods no longer scented the air,

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which had to run somewhere between fresh and braying. For the moment she was a perfect dot, and very had indeed the girl's attitude to her surroundings. She looked out upon the beautiful, quiet world, but she sensed nothing of what her eyes beheld. Her mind was not upon the object of her journey, and her thoughts were contented round the problem of the drama of ~~the~~

It was difficult for her life seemed to have suddenly become from that which she had contemplated that morning. A great disappointment yes, but with her mother had been established her innocence to her. Her training and instincts were still there, and the last thing might upset every hope she entertained, but there was now with her the remembrance that George Lincoln was innocent, and to that thought she felt a wonderful security. That he was a smuggler was a matter of indifference. She loved him too well to let such an charge over a her estimation of him. She was too much out of the groove to consider as trifling a matter. Half the farmers in the country were in the habit of breaking the Customs regulations by cutting wood and hay on the Government lands without a permit, and even hauling these things from across the border when such a course ~~marked~~ them, and in every case it was "contraband," but they were thought on less of by their friends. Justice was on ~~the~~ her side, they no spite of the fact that her offence earned with it a really heavier sentence.

It was the dread that she might be too late to intercept her brother. Prudence would almost have been happy at the speed along that westward bound trail. She knew her brother's nature well. She knew that he was vindictive, and no doubt for even the smallest of his bad mould he bore and all the bitter spurs of his manly nature, but she also knew that he need money - needed money. The greed for gold was a glittering road on which he was insatiate of running, and he would sacrifice any personal feeling provided the advancement was sufficiently large. She meant that the amount should be as large as even he could think, and she knew that in this direction his ideas were extensive. Her one trouble, the one thought which alarmed her was the ~~the~~ retard of time. If the ~~the~~ steps could not be all of them the journey would

have been in vain, for the operator lived in Andover and would have gone home. Hersey would have arrived in Woonsocket and by the time the offer opened the following morning the mischief would have been done.

The October heat mare with the end of her reins and touched her flank with her heel. Kitty responded with a forward bound. The increased speed was not too slow for the rapid thought and dead accuracy of the girl, but she was too good a horsewoman to press the willing beast beyond a rational gait.

The hairy mare "prepped" Kitty as she passed down the sharp side of a dried out knoll. She plodged through a thicket of long grass and a grey cloud of mosquitoes rose and enveloped horse and rider. The horse's coat settled like a grey cloth upon the heated mare and Prudence's soft flesh was pattered by hundreds of prancing needles at once. The girl swept the insects from neck and face borders of the torturing shawl. The mare fretted and turned up the opposite slope while the girl leant forward in her saddle and sought to relieve the staunch little creature's agony by sweeping the pinnaeous insects from her steaming coat.

The mare pressed on. Suddenly she threw up her head and snorted violently. Prudence was startled. Something had disturbed Kitty's attention, and her wide set ears were cocked in alarm. Her nose was held high, and again and again she inhaled. In consequence her pace was slackened and became awkward. She no longer kept a straight line along the trail, but moved from side to side in evident agitation. Prudence was puzzled and endeavored to steady the creature. But Kitty was not to be easily appalled. She rattled her bit and nuzzled it determinedly, grubbing at the sole bar with an evident desire to secure it in her teeth. The girl kept a tight rein and attempted to set the horse with the tender muscles of her hand, but her efforts were unavailing. The ears were now turned backwards and had assumed that curiously vicious inclination which in a horse is indicative of bad temper or savage terror. Kitty had no vice in her, and Prudence quickly understood the nature of her mare's feelings.

The failure of her soothing efforts alarmed the girl.

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She sat up and looked about her. In the dense forest there seemed to be no unusual appearance. The trees were waving and bending in the wind and their growthings had a slightly dolorous effect upon the scene, but otherwise there was nothing strange to be observed. The sky had assumed a leaden hue and in the direction the prospect was not alluring but the clouds were fairly high and there was no suggestion of imminent storm.

Suddenly a couple of jack rabbits darted across the road. The mare "pranced," reared and strung round towards the trees. Prudence brought her up to her mark sharply. Then she saw that the rabbits were racing on ahead down the trail. For the moment her patience gave way, and she dug her heel hard against Killa's side and the mare plunged forward. But her gait remained unsteady and in her agitation she kept changing her stride and once even tripped and nearly fell.

A coyote followed by his mate and two young ones ran out on to the trail and raced along ahead of her. They did not even turn their heads to look at her. Further on a great timber wolf appeared and trotted along the edge of the woods, every now and then turning its head furtively to glance back.

Then quite suddenly Prudence became conscious of something unusual. She raised her face to the grey vault of the sky and sniffed at the air. A pungent scent was borne upon the wind. The odour of smoke was as strong as to be sickly, came to her and its pungency was not the ordinary scent of the forest about her.

Half a dozen kit-foxes dashed out on to the trail and jumped in the trees and the "yowl" of the prairie dog warned her that other animals were about. The noxious odour grew stronger every moment and at last Prudence detected the smell of smoke. She turned her head and looked back and behind her directly in her wake she saw a thin grey haze which the wind was sweeping along above the trees.

She drew her mare up to a stand and as she sat looking back, a deadly fear crept into her eyes. Killa reared and reared and plunged in protest. The restraint could not hold. And all the time the girl saw that the smoke haze was thickening, and some strange

distant sounds like the discharge of heavy ordnance reached her.

The sweet oval face wore a strained expression; her eyes were wide open and staring and the fear which looked out of them was fear of no ordinary danger. She watched the dull haze as it thickened and moved on towards her. She saw it rise like great steam jets and wrench itself upwards as fresh volumes drove over the lower strata. She saw the dull brown tail creep into it as it densified, and she knew that it was smoke. The rest needed no explanation beyond the evidence of her senses. The sickly resinous smell told her what had happened. The forest was on fire!

The thought found vent in a muttered exclamation. Then came an after-thought—

"And the wind is blowing straight along behind me."

For a moment she gazed about her wildly. She looked to the right and left. The forest walls were impassable. She looked back along the trail. The narrow ribbon-like space was filled with a fog of smoke which was even now enveloping her. What should she do? There was nothing for that to go on. But the fire must be travelling away in the high wind. Still she stood. It seemed as though for the moment her faculties were paralyzed with the horror of her discovery.

But at last she was moved to action. The mare became troublesome. The girl could no longer keep her still. The distracted animal bumped her back and began to show signs of "bucking." Then came a rush of animals along the trail, they came racing for dear life, and their numbers were augmented from the wounded depths which lined their route.

Antelope led the way; with heads thrown up and antlers pressed low down upon their backs they seemed to fly over the sandy soil. Then came the "loping" dogs, coyotes, prairie wolves. Birds of all sorts assembled in one long continuous flight. The animal kingdom of that region of forest seemed to have become united in their mutual terror - wolf and hare, coyote and jack-rabbit, hawk and blackbird, prairie chicken and grey-owl, all sworn enemies in time of calm prosperity, but now, in these terror, impregnable to the last. And all the

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Now is the gathering twilight of winter—now the distant  
homing to the house of great silence.

The girl leaned forward. She pressed her head high  
against the snowdrift, and with a silent prayer joined in  
the race for life.

She had no exact knowledge of how far these tracks  
extended, or where the trail would run which should  
set off the fire. The wild beasts were sprung and down  
the trail, and with the intent of her plan a wild, she  
thought that in this direction must be right.

The snow grew deeper and more clinging. Her eyes  
burned sore. Under her she felt the snow stretching  
beneath to the utmost of her feet. She came up to the  
edge of the snowdrift, one of the last, but they did  
not attempt to make it be the end of her search. They  
were beginning to fear of human danger. A man or a  
woman was behind them, passing with greater strides  
which demonstrated open to be a need for warning.

Her mind at the moment the fire grew to the size of the man's  
best efforts, and that she knew that the fire was growing.  
Her eyes dimmed with tears now. It must be a small  
distance now to the camp to split them. It is never  
flamed, and with increasing speed her fading vision  
even more sure. A man or a woman best off, I said to  
the animal. But she did all she knew to assist her  
waking companion, but for every stride the farther apart  
from the home that the fire was growing many yards.

The hunting had increased to a steady rate in the  
middle of which the dog paused, his determined eyes like  
the pins of a rising star. The wind pushed breathing forward, the fire, going with it an almost silent sweep  
of heated air. The mighty forest gods sent her heat  
like rods under the ice of her skin, and she had about three  
feet at the coming of the devouring flame.

The man started doing like a wild horse. A silent  
bray to a wild beast. The off-hand hand moved across  
it. The stream of the human blood gushed on about her  
like heated the steep ascent of a grade, and Paul had  
the blood had no time. He dared not allow the horse to  
run up such an incline, even though the fire were only  
to a quarter of a mile of her, she would have been mad to  
abandon the darkling creature which was now her only

hope. Even the poor forest creatures, mad as they were with terror, slackened their gait.

At length the hill's rim was gained, and a long descent confronted them. It still showed no signs of exhaustion yet, and faced her work amidst the rush of refugees with all her original zest. Down into the valley they tore, for the thirst of all perils was in pursuit.

The valley stretched away far into the distance; ahead, here, in this hollow, the air was clearer. The hill had shot off the fog of smoke for the moment. The red green now had a smooth rim, and a faint glimmer of hope gladdened the heart of the girl.

Without slowing her speed, she looked back at the hill, fearing to see the crimson flames dart up over the path which her mare's foot had so recently trodden. But the flame had not yet reached the brow, and she sighed her satisfaction. The smoke was pouring over the tree-tops, at first, curling and rolling in a long mass, then creeping back in her wake, but as yet there were no flames. She looked this way and that at the dark green of the endless woods, the greyish-green of bending pines. The thought of the heat to which must now have gone away, leaving behind it only the charred skeletons, the barren, leafless trunks which for years would remain to mark the cruel path of flame.

Hadid, in the rear, which had partly died away into a vague, distant murmur beyond the hill, burst out again with redoubled fury. Again she looked round, and the gleaming was made plain to her. She saw the yellow fringe of flame as it came dancing, chaotic, a tattered ribbon of light upon the brow of the hill. She saw the dense pan of smoke hazing, in a glassy mist like the threat of some dreadfull doom. The track of the forest upon the summit remained for a second, then ever except the red-gold fire shooting all living air in an almost torrential rush down to the woodlands below.

And now she beheld a sea of living fire as the hills blazed before her eyes. It was as though the whole place had been lit at one touch. The sea rolled on with incredible swiftness, as the tongue of flame licked up the inflammable objects they encountered. The efforts of her mare became puny in comparison with the fearful

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pace of the horses. How could she hope to outstrip such awful speed?

On and over the mare, and on came the golden torrent. Now the heat was insupportable. The girl leaned upright over her. In that horse's neck, she was dry and comforted. Every blast of the wind burst hot more fiercely as the fire drove nearer. She felt how utterly hopeless were her horse's efforts.

The mare faltered in her stride; it was her first trip. The girl shrieked wildly. She screamed at the top of her voice like one demented. Her nerves were failing, and last, she grasped her. Kitty reddened her cheeks. The fear of the fire was aggravated by the girl's outcries, and she stretched herself as she had never done before.

Now it seemed as though they were racing in the heat of a furnace. The whole country was in flames, and the roar and crackling of falling timber was torment, and the smoke plume was everywhere, even ahead.

Hundred dashed the girl out borne on by the faithful Kitty. She no longer thought of what was to come behind her. What little strength was left to her she exerted upon keeping her seat in the saddle. An awful fear possessed her, and everything about her seemed instant.

Kitty alone fought out the battle of that ride. Her mistress was beyond all but her clinging upon the faithful animal's back. Had she been less exhausted the girl would have seen what the mare saw. She would have seen the mad stream of the fire sweep ahead, and less than a quarter of a mile away. But she saw nothing, she left clinging, she clung to nothing but her hold upon the saddle. Then it was that when she came to the riverbed, and the mare plunged from the steep bank into the deep, quick flowing stream, she knew not what had happened but, with a strange temerity, she held to the pommel of her saddle, while her loyal friend breasted the waters.

How they got out of the fire Prudence never knew, nor did she fully realize all that had happened when at last the horse and rider again stood on firm ground. And the tough little branches had covered another mile or more before the girl awoke to the fact that they were now in an open prairie country, and during the long

of the great southern muskeg. Then it all came back to her, and, as her heart kept steadily on, she looked fearfully about her. She saw away in the distance the awful pall, the lurid gleam of the flames, and a heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving went up from that lonely trail for the merciful escape which had been hers. The girl leaned over her mare's shoulder and caressed the foaming neck.

"Good kitty, faithful little mare," she exclaimed emotionally. Then she looked abroad and she remembered all. "But on, girl, on. There is more to do yet."

\* \* \* \* \*

The telegraph operator at Damdale was closing up his little shack. He had just disconnected his instrument and was standing in his doorway gazing out across the prairie to the east, watching the vast clouds of smoke belching from the direction of the woods. All about him was a heavy haze, and a nasty taste of smoke was in his mouth. He looked across to the only other buildings which formed the city of Damdale, the grain elevator and the railway siding buildings. His own hut was close beside the latter. The men were leaving their work. Then presently he looked back in the direction of the distant fire.

"Tain't the prairie," he muttered. "Too thick. Guess the woods are blazin'. That's beyond the Rosy Can't cross there, so I reckon there's no danger to us. The air do stink here, guess I'll go and git my hand-air and ramoose."

He turned back to the room and put on his hat. Just as he left his doorway to pass over to where his bandicat was standing on the railway track he brought up to a halt. A horse and rider were racing up the trail towards him.

"Hello, what's this?" he exclaimed sharply. "May-be it is the prairie."

Prudence drew rein beside him. She had seen her man, and she knew that she was in time. Her joy was written in her face.

"My but I've had a time," she exclaimed, as she slid down from her saddle. "I thought that fire had got me. Call up Winnipeg, please, Mr. Frances."

"Why, Miss Malling have you ridden through that?" asked the operator, pointing to the distant smoke.

"Not through it, but with it distinctly hot upon my heels—or rather my mare's," the girl laughed. "But I want you to send a message for me. It isn't too late for Winnipeg?"

"Late, bless you, no. But what is it? Prairie or forest?"

"Forest," replied the girl shortly. "Where's a form?"

They passed into the hut. Prudence proceeded to write out her message while the man connected up Winnipeg and carried on a short conversation.

"Bad fire," he said.

"Very."

Prudence began to write.

"Just where?"

"Owl Hoot."

"River'll stop it."

"Yes."

"Good."

Prudence went on writing.

"Iredale's ranch burnt out?"

The girl started.

"Don't know."

"Must be."

"Oh!" Then: "Here you are; and do you mind if I wait for an answer?"

"Pleasure." And the man read the message—

"To Hervey Malling, Northern Union Hotel, Winnipeg.

"Return at once. Money awaiting you. Willing to pay the price on your arrival. Do not fail to return at once. The other matter can rest."

"PRUDENCE."

The operator tapped away at the instrument.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hervey was sitting in the Northern Union Hotel smoking-room. He was talking to a burly man, with a red face and a shock of ginger-grey hair. This was the proprietor of the hotel.

"How long can you give me? I can settle everything by this day month. The harvesting is just finished. I only need time to haul the grain to the elevator. Will that satisfy you?"

The big man shrugged.

"You've put me off so often, Mr. Malling. It's not business, and you know it," he replied gutturally. "Will you give me an order on—your crop?"

He looked squarely into the other's face. Hervey hesitated. He knew that he could not do this, and yet he was sorely pressed for money. However, he made up his mind to take the risk. He thought his mother would not go back on him.

"Very well."

He turned as the bell-boy approached.

"Telegram for you sir; 'expressed.' "

Hervey took the envelope and tore it open. He read his sister's message, and a world of relief and triumph lit up his face.

"Good," he muttered. Then he passed it to his companion. "Read that. Do you still need a mortgage? I shall set out to-night."

The hotel proprietor read the message, and a satisfied smile spread over his face. It did not do for him to press his customers too hard. But still he was a business man. He, too, felt relieved.

"This relates to—"

"An outlying farm of mine which I have now sold."

"Your promise will be sufficient, Mr. Malling. I thought we should find an amicable settlement for our difficulty. You start to-night?"

"Yea."

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE AVENGEK

Alice was standing at the gate of the little front garden. She was talking to her lover, who had just ridden up from the direction of Owl Hoot. Robb had not dismounted, and his face was very serious as he leant down towards her.

"And I never knew a word about it. It's a jolly good thing I obtained the delivery of his bunch of cattle when I did, or goodness knows what would have happened. Well, anyhow I've lost a nice lump. My client, when he heard about the place being for sale, wanted to buy it for a back country for his beavers to winter in. Just my confounded luck. I knew there was a big fire out this way but I never thought that Iredale was the unfortunate victim. Now I've got to go over to Lakeville to see him—he's staying there, you know, since he was burnt out. I'll come back this way, and if Mrs. Malling can put me up for the night, I'll be grateful. My 'plug' won't stand the journey back home. You say Hervey will be along this evening?"

"Yes," replied the girl. Then seriously, "What are you going to do?"

"Interview him. There are things about that dog that want explaining. I take it he can explain 'em. I don't easily forget. And I owe some one a deal more than I've yet been able to pay. P'r'aps that dog'll help me to discharge my debt. Good-bye, Al; I must be off or I shan't get back this afternoon."

Robb turned away in his cheerful, debonair manner and rode off. Troubles sat lightly on his stout heart. His effervescent nature never left him long depressed when Fortune played her freakish tricks upon him. He had lost his commission upon the sale of Iredale's land, but he had secured the better deal of the cattle. Therefore he was satisfied. But Robb was a very persistent

man in his extremely haphazard fashion. He had proposed to make an interview with Hervey about his dog. He had never forgotten to forgive the disaster in the mountains, and he believed that Hervey would be able to set him on the track of Zebulon Smith whom he felt certain he had seen at the Winnipeg depot. He hoped so, and for this purpose, he intended to spend the night at Loon Dyke Farm.

At her lover's side was Alice turned back to the house. The anxious look was still upon her face. She knew that there was serious trouble in the family, and she could see no way of helping these people she cared for. Prudence was in full disgrace with her mother, she had been absent from the farm for two days and had not returned that morning. Mrs. Mayring had been distracted with anxiety and grief until the reappearance of her daughter, and then, when she saw that she was ill and that no accident had happened to her, she had flown into such a terrible passion that even Prudence had quailed before her. Never in her life had Alice seen the kindly old soul give way to such rage. Not daring to let her had been too fond for her child, and she had firmly clasped the girl from the room in which they had met. Since then Prudence had retreated to her bedroom and Hepzibah had passed out the bulk of her wrath upon an angry Alice, for even the long-suffering hired girl had feared to face her.

Now as Alice again lay the front door again, she heard the sound of high-pitched voices coming from the kitchen. Sarah Gurney had come over while the form of a rage was at its height, and as Alice listened she thought that these two old cronies were quarreling. But her ear quickly told her that her surmise was wrong. She heard Prudence's voice raised in angry protest and, instead of entering the house, she discreetly withdrew, passing round to the forecourt instead.

In the kitchen a stormy scene was being enacted.

Prudence was standing just inside the door. Her mother was by the long table on which were laid out the necessities for pastry making. She had faced round upon the girl and of out from under a rolling pin in one hand and in the other she held a small basket of eggs. Sarah was seated in a high-backed Windsor chair. Her arms were folded across her waist, and her face expressed

perplexed alarm. Prudence's face was afame; nor were her eyes one whit less angry than her mother's.

"But I say you shud hear me, mother, whether you like it or not. I'll not let you or any one else call me the bith which you did this mornin' for nothing."

The girl's voice was hoarse with nervous feeling. Mrs. Malling shook her rolling pin in a perfect fury.

"Out of this kitchen, you baggage! Out of it, do you hear me? Go an' get your garments packed up, and out ye go into the street. Child o' my flesh, are ye? Out of my house, you drab, or maybe I'll be doing you a harm I'll teach the like o' you to be stoppin' out o' nights an' then to come back wi'out a word of explainin'. I'll teach you."

"Give the child a hearing, Hephzibah," said Sarah, in her soft even tones, as there came a hush in the angry mother's tirade.

Prudence shot a grateful glance in her preceptor's direction.

Hephzibah turned swiftly on the peaceful Sarah. But the words of anger which hovered upon her lips remained unspoken. Sarah was an influence in the old lady's life, and long association was not without effect. She visibly calmed. Prudence saw the change and took advantage of it.

"How could I explain when you wouldn't listen to me?" she exclaimed resentfully. "Almost before I could say a word you called me all the shameful things you could think of. You drove me to silence when I was willing to tell you all—I was more than willing. You must know all, for the story I have to tell as nearly affects you as it does me. I stayed away from home to save an innocent man from the dreadful charge of murder, and your son from perpetrating the most wanton act of his worthless life."

A dead silence followed her words. Hephzibah stared at her with an expression of stupefied amazement, while Sarah turned to her chair with a movement which was almost a jolt. The silence was at last broken by the girl's mother.

"Murder? Hervey?"

And there was no understanding in her tone. Her mind seemed to be groping blindly, and she merely repeated the two words which struck her most forcibly.

"You, 'murder' and 'Hersey'?" Prudence retorted. "Hersey has ruined George Iredale of the Order of Deane Grey. Now will you listen to my explanation?"

Herbrysh perched herself on a chair. Then Ding-dong was returned to its place upon the dough-board on the clutter, and the basket of eggs was set down with a force that seemed to paralyze its contents.

"Yes, girl. Tell me all. Let me hear what devilish work my Hersey has been up to. Is that not George Iredale a murderer?"

And Prudence's anger evaporated as swiftly as her mother had. And the two relatives of her love for George and her he had asked her to be his wife. She told them how Hersey had come to live with the story of his discovery, how after attempting to blacken his victim, he had offered his information to her at a price. How she forced him to prove his case, and had sent him to Wimpey with that object, how she had been nearly distracted and eventually made up her mind to go and see Iredale himself. How the accused man had retorted to her his innocence beyond question, and how he had shown her his impotence to defend himself by forbidding her to use the same means of clearing himself in a court of law. She dwelt upon each point so that these two, who were so dear to her, did not fail to understand as she understood. Then she told them how recognising George's danger, she had resolved to intercept Hersey, and with her mother's assistance put him off, and finally how she had been overtaken by the Iredale boy, and how her mare who had acted she had succeeded in detaching him to send her message to her brother, and how, failing any other means of returning home she had taken shelter in the elevator which still her mare had recovered and she was able to resume her journey to the farm.

It was a long story, and the many fermishes of her tale brought the girl much extra trouble in relating, but with the end of it, nothing more had been said, because of the fact that the boy had been a little girl that puzzled her and vexed.

When the story was finished, its effect was more or less like a bomb. The something which seemed to have sprung from the girl's heart, and telling was the part her boy had played. The round eyes had grown stern, and her curly lips had parted as her breath came heavy and

lost. At last she burst out with a sudden burst of anger and sorrow in her words.

"Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, an' to think o' the bairn! My Harvey a sheep of baa, a blood o' other. Oh, that I should be bairn to see such a day," and she tucked herself with her hand supporting her head and her elbows planted upon her knees. "Oh, them travelin' in foreign parts. My poor poor Setae if he'd just lived long enough to get around and buy with a honest piece to git he been spared this disgrace. Prudence, girl, I am that sorry for what I've said to you."

Tears rolled on the old face, which had now become very wistful, and slowly rolled down the puffy cheeks. Suddenly she gathered up her apron and flung it up over her head and the rocking continued dismal. Prudence came over to her and knelt at her side, causing her stout figure to sympathize. Sarah sat looking away towards the window with dreamy eyes. The old school-mistress made no comment, she was thinking deeper.

"Don't cry mother," said Prudence with an anxious catch in her voice. "Whatever Harvey's failin', he will reap his own punishment. I want you to help me now, dear. I want you to give me the benefit of your experience and your sound practical sense. I must see this through. I have a wicked brother and an obstinate lover to deal with, and I want you to help me, and tell me what is best to do."

The apron was removed from Mrs. Mallings' head, and her eyes, red and watery, looked at the girl at her side with a world of love in their depths.

"These two men will be here this afternoon," the girl went on. "George is coming to tell you his story himself that you may judge him. He declares that come what may, he will not rest until the shadow's upon him. In justice to us his friends, and to himself, he must face the consequences of his years of wrongdoing. Harvey will be here for his money. This is the position, and, according to my reckoning they will arrive at about the same time. I don't quite know why, but I want to confront Harvey with the man he names. Now tell me what you think."

"I am thinking you make the third of a pack of fool-heads" said the farm wife gently. "George is no murderer, he's not the killing sort. He's a man, he is. Then

why worry? An' say, if that boy o' mine comes along he'll learn that them At the gold fields is a easier place for his likes than his mother's farm." The old woman's voice was rising again with tempestuous suddenness. "Say he's worse n' a skunk and a sight more dangerous than a Greaser. My but he'll learn somethin' from them as can teach him!"

"Yes, mother," replied the girl, a little impatiently, "but you don't seem to see the seriousness of what he charges—"

"That I do, miss. Am I wantin' in understandin'? George is as innocent as an unborn babe, so what's the odds along o' Hervey's accusin'? It don't amount to a heap o' corn shocks. That boy ain't responsible, I tell ye. He's like to get locked up himself in a luny 'sylum. I'll give him accusin'!"

"But, mother, that won't do any good. He must be paid off."

"An' so he shall—and so he shall, child. There's more dollars in this farm than he reckons on and they're ready for usin' when I say the word. If it's pay that's needed he shall be paid though I can't just understandin' the need."

Sarah's voice broke in at this point.

"The child's right, Hephzibah, there's money to be spent over this thing, or I'm no judge of human nature. Hervey's got a strong case, and from what the story tells us, George is a doomed man if he goes before the court. Innocent he may be—innocent he is, I'll wager; but if he's obstinate he's done for."

The farm wife made no reply, but sat gazing wistfully before her.

"Yes, yes," Prudence said earnestly, "It is just the money nothing more. We must not let an innocent man suffer. And, 'Aunt' Sarah, we must prevail upon George to let us stop Hervey's mouth. That is our chief difficulty. You will help me—you and mother. You are so clever, 'Aunt' Sarah. George will listen to you. Oh, we must—must save him, even against himself."

Sarah nodded her head sagely, she was deeply affected by all she had heard, but she gave no outward sign.

"Child," she replied, "we will all do our best—for him—for you, but yours is the tongue that will persuade him best. He loves you, child, and you love him. He will not permit, if you are set against it."

"I hope it will be as you say," replied Prudence.

dubiously. "But when he comes you will let him tell his story in his own way. You will listen patiently to him. Then you can laugh at his determination, and I can hear your arguments to bear. Then we will keep him until Harvey arrives, and we will settle the matter for ever. Oh, mother, I dread what is to come."

Miss Mallard did not seem to be paying much heed but, as the girl moved away from her side, she spoke. There was no grief, no anger in her voice now. She spoke quite softly, and Sarah could only look keenly over at her.

"Yes, girl, we'll settle this in time, and—Harvey—"

Prudence moved towards the door. She turned at her mother's words.

"I will go up stairs," she said. "I want to think."

She opened the door and nearly ran against the dog Neeche who was standing by it. There was a faint suggestion of the raw whisper about the creature, but still he was almost tame. He moved slowly away, and walked with the girl to the foot of the stairs, where he laid himself down with a complacent grunt. The girl went up to her room.

"This day's lovin' will be writ on my heart for ever," said the farm-wife plaintively, as the door closed behind her daughter.

"As you see, Hepzibah, and let no one read of them, for there will be little credit for any one in those times," said Sarah solemnly.

Miss Mallard hugged herself, and again began to rock slowly. But there were no signs of tears in her round, dark eyes. Now and again her lips moved, and occasionally she muttered to herself. Sarah heard the name "Harvey" pass her lips once or twice, and she knew that her old friend had been sorely stricken.

As the time for Leedale's arrival drew near, Prudence became restless. Her day had been spent in idleness as far as her farm work was concerned. She had chosen the companionship of Alice, and had unbent and her heart to her. But sympathetic and practical as her friend was, she was quite unable to help her.

As four o'clock drew near, however, Alice did the only thing possible. She took herself off for a walk down the Lakeville trail. She felt that it was better for everybody that she should be away while the trouble was on, and

under the would meet her lover on his way to the farm, and get him timely warning against making his intended stay for the night.

At the organized meet there came the matter of a person's body at the front gate, and a moment later Prudence led her lover into the parson. After a few brief words she hurriedly departed to minister to her mother and Sarah. There was a significant silence in the room, of course, nor was it broken by the minister's ministrations. The foolish youth seemed impressed with what was happening, for he clung to the girl's skirt, looking her over shrewdly, and finally laid down upon the tracing pattern of her skirt when she took up her parson's hands for love and waited for him to begin.

The opening was a painful one for everybody. Prudence knew how to face things of the sort and received her disgraceful story. She thought of all they had been to him during his long years upon the farm. He thought of their implicit trust and faith in him. He almost quailed before the steady honest eyes of the old people. However, he at last forced himself to his task and plunged into his story with uncompromising bluntness.

"I am accused of murder," he said, and paused, while a sickly feeling pervaded his stomach.

Mrs. Mayhew nodded her head. She was too open to remain silent long.

"Oh George Grey," she said at once. "And ye needn't be tellin' us nothing more George. We know the sort you are about to tell us. An' does think we're givin' to believe any adobe-painted scallywag such as my Harry agin you? Strugglin' you may be, but that you've used to killin' human flesh not even a minister o' the Gospel's gun to convince us. Here I respects the man I give my hand to. Shake me by the hand, George, shake me by the hand." And the farm wife rose from her chair and ambled across the room with her hand outstretched.

Prudence clasped it in both of hers. And never in his life had he experienced such a burst of thankfulness as he did at that moment. His heart was too full to speak. Prudence smiled gravely as she watched this who-cherished token of her mother's loyalty to a friend. But Mrs. Sarah looked wistful in her expression of good-will.

"Mephistleth a right, George, and the sprout for both

of us. But there's work to be done for all that. Hervey 's to be dealt with."

"To be hanged," said Hepzibah uncompromisingly, as she returned to her seat.

Iredale shrank his head and his face set sternly. Prudence saw the look she feared creep into her lover's eyes, she opened her lips to protest, but the words remained unspoken. She had heard the rattle of a buckboard outside. The sound died away, and she knew that the vehicle had passed round to the barn. She waited in an agony of suspense for her brother's appearance.

"You wouldn't to shake your head went on the farm-wife. "This matter's my concern. It's my dollars as is given to pay Master Hervey -an' when he gets 'em may they blister his fingers, I say."

Prudence heard a footstep in the hall. The crucial moment had arrived, and her heart palpitated with nervous apprehension. Before Iredale could reply the door was flung open, and Hervey stood in their midst. Instantly every eye was turned upon him. He stood for a moment and looked round. There was a slight unsteadiness in his attitude. His great eyes looked wilder than ever and they were curiously bloodshot. At least one of the three ladies possessed an observant mind. Sarah saw that the man had been drinking. To her the signs, though slight, were unmistakable. The others did not seem to notice his red face.

"Ah," he said, with an attempt at pliancy, "a nice little party. Well, I've come for the girls."

He eyes lit upon the figure of George Iredale and he broke off. The next moment he went on angrily.

"What's that man doing in this house?" he cried, his eyes fairly blazing with sudden rage. "Is the place turned into a refuge for murderers?"

The man's fury had set fire to the powder train. The mother was at her best in a twinkling. Her uncomfortable body fairly shook in her indignation. Her face was a flaming scarlet, and her round eyes sparkled wickedly.

"And who be you to question the casting of my house, Hervey Hailing?" she cried, "since when comes it that you've the right to raise your voice against my guests? An' by what right d' ye dare to accuse an innocent man? Answer me, you heap of Evil," she demanded. But she

gave him no time to speak, and went on, her voice rising to a piercing crescendo. "Spare your wicked tongue which should be forced by reason of the curse he has fallen from it. Oh that you should be able to call me 'mother.' I'd rather mother the offspring of a rattlesnake than you. What have you done by us all your life but bring sorrow and trouble upon those who've done all that which in them is to help you? Coward! Traitor! Are you come now with lies on your tongue to harm an innocent man what's done you no harm?" She breathed hard. Then her wrath swept on and the mouth rang with the piercing pitch of her voice. "You've come for your blood money—your thirty pieces. You villain—if your poor father were alive this day he should lay a raw hide about you 'till your bones were bared. Snakes! I've a mind to set about you myself. Look at him the blackheart! Look at him a'! Was ever such little of a man? and him my son—Blood money! Blood money! And to think that I'm bring to have it."

She paused. Hersey broke in—

"Mother, you old fool! You don't know what you're talking about. That man's pointing over at Fredale, who's not waiting for an opportunity to interfere, "in the murderer of Leslie Grey. I suppose he has been pricking you with memory and yarning. But I tell you he murdered Grey. I'm not here for any tomfoolery. I got Prudel's message to say the money was forthcoming. Where is it? Fifteen thousand dollars buys me, and that I want at once. If I have any more sayin' g I'll make it twenty thousand."

He looked about him angrily and his eyes finally passed at George Fredale seated beside Prudel. He said nothing for his mother's vituperation, but he was watchful of the youngster.

Suddenly the boy rancher sprang to his feet. He stepped up to Hersey. The latter moved a pace back.  
"At one cent you cowardly bound!" he roared.  
"Not one cent shall you have, do you hear? I thank God that I am here to stop you robbing these, your mother and sister." Mrs. M. L. Ing tried to interfere, but he waved her back. "I've come at the right time and I tell you that you shall not take one cent of the money. I will never leave you 'till you should shoo'd it from them. I will open your grave. This is what I intend to do. You and I will not rest for Wimpyng to-night, and together we

will interview the Commissioner of Police. Do you understand me? I have the ship hand now. And I promise you your silence shall not be bought."

Prudence interfered.

"Listen to me, George. I implore you not to do this thing. Hervey can have all he wants—everything. You are innocent we know, but you cannot prove your innocence. What shall you break my heart when there is a way out of the difficulty? There is but one person who can denounce you and his silence we can purchase. Oh, George," the girl went on passionately, "as you love me, listen. My heart will break if that thing you meditate comes to pass. Oh, it is love, say you not 'tis do I?" Let mother pass the man off that he may pass out of our lives for ever. Here, mother is going for the money now. It is so easy, so simple."

The young lad rose from his seat and moved away to the door. Hervey stood at the far end of the parlour facing the open window. He saw his mother pass out and a great rush of air as the same came into his eyes. After all, these women meant to treat him fairly, he thought.

He grinned over at Iredale.

"Better drop it, Iredale and don't play the fool. When I get the money I shall forget that I ever knew you."

The amazement was about to fire a swift retort when the sound of voices coming in at the open window interrupted him. The voices were a man's and a woman's. Prudence recognised Alice's tones. The other she did not recognise at once.

Sarah Gurnidge, who had been a silent observer of the scene, had heard the sound too, but she was absorbed in what was being enacted about her. Her eyes were upon Hervey. She saw him start and his great hunting eyes were turned upon the window. Suddenly he rushed forward towards it. He had to pass round the table close to where Prudence was now standing. In doing so he knocked against the dog which was standing with its nose picked up and its head turned in the direction whence the voices sounded.

The man's red face was blanched. A wild, hunted look was in his eyes. Iredale saw what she had, and his reply died upon his lips as he wondered at this sudden change.

"Shoot the window. Do you hear?" said Hervey emphatically. "Don't let them come. Don't let them—

He had reached the window to carry out his own sentence. His hands were upon the window-sill, and he was about to fling the glass-framed frame. But suddenly his arms dropped to his sides. He stood face to face with the figure of Robb Chillingwood.

There was a dreadful silence. Then slowly Hervey backed away, his glaring eyes fixed upon the stern countenance of the ex-constable officer. Slowly he backed, backed from the opposition, and the muscles quivered the pallid cheeks and blazing eyes, and they quivered helplessly. Nor did Hervey pause until he reached the wall furthest from the window. Then he stood at that point, unmoved.

Suddenly there was a cry, and it rang with vengeful intensity. It came from the man at the window—Robb Chillingwood.

"By God! it's Zachary Smith!"

The next instant and he was in the room.

The colonists gazed blankly from one to the other of the two men. What did it mean? Who was Zachary Smith? And who did Robb mean? Hervey? Then their eyes settled on the man against the wall. The cheeks were no longer pallid; they were flushed with a hectic colouring and these strong features were filled with an awful, murderous light. The body seemed to move, but he did not speak; only his right hand slipped round behind him.

Then Hervey's voice sounded through the room again.

"No, Mr. Zachary! 'tis we meet again. And by the Lord Harry, you shall swing for what you did to the mountain. Highway robbers of the Government bullock under the charge of Leslie Grey, and the murder of our Indian guide, 'Ivan' Moon." Then he turned. "Hold that door!" he shouted, and Irene sprang to obey.

"But—" Prudence rushed forward, but Hervey stopped her and drew her back.

A wild laugh came from Hervey's direction.

"And where going to take me?" he cried. "You, Robb Chillingwood, you? Ha, ha!" and the maniacal laugh rang out again. "Look to yourself, you fool. Grey crossed my path, and he paid for it with his life. You shall follow him."

While his words yet rang upon the air his hand shot out from behind his back, a heavy revolver. The pistol was raised, and a sharp snap up from the two bushes.

Suddenly there was a rush, a snarl, and a great body seemed to literally hurl itself through the air. A shot rang out, simultaneously a cry echoed through the room. Hervey staggered as something seized him by the throat and tore away the soft flesh, another shot followed.

It all happened in a twinkling. Hervey fell to the ground with a gurgling cry, and Neeche, the dog, until then forgotten by everybody, rolled over by his side with one dying yelp of pain. Then silence reigned throughout the room and all was still.

Iredale returned his smoking pistol to his pocket, and went over to Hervey's side. His movements seemed to release the others from the spell under which they had been held. Robb, unharmed by Hervey's shot, came forward and Sarah and Prudence followed in his wake. But Iredale waved the ladies back.

"Stand away, please," he said quietly. "The dog had finished him before I got my shot in to save him. The brute has literally torn his throat out." Then he looked over at the dead hound. "It's awful; I wonder what made the dog turn upon him?"

"Are they both dead?" asked Robb, in an awe-struck voice.

Iredale nodded.

"It must have been the sight of Hervey's levelled pistol that made the dog rush at him," said Prudence. "I've seen him do so before."

"Strange, strange," murmured Iredale.

"That dog feared Bremar," said Sarah.

"Perhaps he had reason," observed Robb significantly, "he only has three sound legs. My God! And not content with his victims in the mountains, he— But, yes, I see it. This man came here without expecting to meet Grey or me." Robb broke off and looked at Prudence. "Of course, I am beginning to understand. You and Grey were to have been married." Then he turned back to the contemplation of the dead bodies.

"Yes, the murderer of Grey lies confessed," said Iredale quietly, "and I think that his motives were even stronger than those attributed to—"

Prudence placed a hand over his mouth before he could complete his sentence.

They were startled from their horrified contemplation

of the work of those last few moments by the sound of Hephzibah's voice calling from her bed room. The sitting room door had been opened by Alice, who had entered the moment Iredale had released the hound. Now they could hear the farm-wife moving about overhead, evidently on her way down stairs.

Sarah was the first to recover her presence of mind. She turned upon Robb.

"Not a word to her about—about—"

Robb shook his head.

Iredale snatched the pistol from the deaf man's hand.

Mrs. Mulling's footsteps came creaking down the stairs. Suddenly Prudence's hands went up to her face as she thought of the shock awaiting her mother. Alice dragged her away to a chair. Iredale and Robb stood looking down at the two objects on the floor. Master and hound were lying side by side.

Sarah ran to the door and met the farm-wife. She must never know that her son was a murderer—a double murderer.

Those within the room heard the school-ma'am's gentle tones.

"No no, Hephzibah, you must not go in there yet. There are things—things which you must not see. The hound has killed him. Hervey enraged the dog, and the wretched beast turned upon him—and he is dead!"

Then there came the sound of a scuffle. The next moment mother Hephzibah pushed her way into the room. She looked about her wildly, one hand was clutching a bundle of hundred-dollar bills. Suddenly her round, staring eyes fell upon the two objects lying side by side upon the ground. She looked at the hound, then she looked upon her son. Iredale had covered the torn throat with pocket handkerchiefs.

The bills slowly fell in a shower from her hand, and her arms folded themselves over her breast. Then she looked in a dazed fashion upon those about her, muttering audibly,

"He's dead—he's dead," she repeated to herself over and over again. Then suddenly she ceased her repetitions and shook her head. "Mussy-a-me, mussy-a-me! The Lord's will be done!"

And she slowly fell in a heap by her dead son's side.

## IN CONCLUSION

Time, the great healer of all suffering, all sorrow, can do much. It is a memory clings with a pertinacity which defies all Time's best efforts. Time may soften the poignancy of deep rooted sorrow, but it cannot shut out altogether the pain of a mother's grief at the loss of an only son. In spite of all Harvey's crimes he was "the only son of his mother, and she was a widow." The story of his villainies was rigidly kept from her, and so she thought of him only as a prodigal, as a boy to be pitied, no one whose off-ices must be condoned, she sought for his good points, and, in her sweet motherly heart, saw a wonderful deal in him on which to centre her loving memory, which had he lived even she could never have discovered. It is nothing that erring man has to be humbly grateful for, that women are like this, so full of the patient, and loving love which can see no wrong in the object of their affections.

But Lonn Dike's harm became intolerable to Hepzibah Malling after the ghastly tragedy of her son's death, and when it shamed Alice now fit to marry, urged on to that risky experiment by the two older ladies, she insisted upon less of the place to them a ridiculous easy terms. She would have given it to them only for their steady refusal to accept such a magnificent wedding gift from her.

The old lady was rich enough for her needs and her daughter's, and a wise woman as she was, she was generous to a fault where her affections were concerned. Prudence too was satisfied with any arrangement which would take her away from the firm. Knowing what she knew of her brother, Lonn Dike could never again be her home. So mother and daughter, tired to Hinsley, and only once again did they return to their old home on the

briefest of visits, and that was to assist at the function of christening the son and heir of the Chillingwoods.

Later on Prudence induced her mother to make Winnipeg her home, but though, for her daughter's sake, she acceded to the request, she was never quite at ease among her new surroundings. Nor was Sarah Gurnidge, when she visited her old friend during her holidays, slow to observe this. "My dear," she told Alice, one day after her summer vacation, "Nephthalah is failing fast. She's quite old, although she is my junior by two years and three months. An idle life doesn't suit her, and as for Prudence, she wears fine clothes, and goes out in society all day and most of the night, but she's that thin and rachaelically that you wouldn't know her for the same child. It's my opinion that she's a sing. They are both passing. I found a letter from Hamilton when I got back home. It was from George Iredale, and I'm going to answer it at once."

"And what are you going to say in your reply?" laughed Alice. "I know your matchmaking propensity. So does Robb."

The quiet dreamy face of the old school-mistress smiled over at the happy mother.

"Say?" she exclaimed. "I'm going to give George a piece of my mind for stayin' so long. I know what he's doing so, and my belief as to the cause of his absence is different from what Prudence is beginnin' to imagine. She thinks he has left her because of her brother's death, and it's 'dat that's driving her to an early grave. I shall certainly tell George what I think." And Sarah wagged her head sagely.

And she was as good as her word. She had not seen fit to tell Alice that she had been in constant communication with George Iredale ever since the day of the tragedy or that she was in his confidence as regarded Prudence. George had left the district to give both Prudence and her mother time to recover from the shock. And now that a year or more had passed away, he had written appealing to Sarah to tell him if she thought the time auspicious for his return.

In a long, carefully-worded letter Sarah advised him not to delay.

"By dint of much perseverance," she wrote, "I have persuaded the child out of her absurd notions about the reflections her brother's doings have cast upon her. She looks at things from a healthier standpoint now. Why should she not marry? What has she done to debar her from fulfilling the mission which is appointed for every woman? Nothing! And I am sure if a certain man should return and renew the appeal which he made at the time when the Lord's anger was visited upon her brother, she would give him a different reply. However, I must not waste all my space upon the silly notions of a child with a misdirected conscience."

And how her letter bore fruit, and how George Iredale returned and sought Prudence in the midst of the distractions of Winnipeg's social whirl, and how the girl's answer, when again he appealed to her, turned out to be the one Sarah had prophesied for him, were matters of great satisfaction to the sage old school-mistress.

She assisted at the wedding which followed, she saw the bride and bridegroom off at the railway depot, she remained to console her old friend for the loss of her daughter. Then she bade her off once more, back to the bleak, staring school-house, where she continued to propound sage maxims for the young of the district until her allotted task was done, and the tally of her years complete.



**DATE DUE SLIP**

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THE HOUND FROM THE NORTH

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